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**INDIA'S STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM :  
ROLE OF  
ASSOCIATED MOVEMENTS**



# India's Struggle for Freedom: Role of Associated Movements

**VOLUME ONE**

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**With a Foreword**  
**By**  
**SHRI RAJIV GANDHI**  
**Prime Minister of India**

**1985**

**A G A M P R A K A S H A N**  
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## FOREWORD

The Indian freedom movement was a saga of courage and endurance in the face of what seemed insuperable odds. By this struggle the mightiest empire that the world had ever known was shaken and finally uprooted by an unarmed people determined to be free. Ever since that famous victory, the very concepts of imperialism and colonialism have fallen from high pedestals to become terms of derision.

The struggle for freedom had a wide base and reflected a consuming hunger for liberty among all sections of our people. Despite differences in strategy and ideology, the aim of all the individuals and groups who flung themselves into the struggle was the freedom, unity and dignity of this great and ancient land. It is important that we remember the sacrifices made in this great cause so that we are better able to value and nourish our hard won independence.

The Congress Party was always in the forefront of the quest for freedom. Inspired by the Congress, various popular organisations grew up in the erstwhile princely states. There were also other organisations which did not subscribe to the ideology of the Congress but whose contribution to the movement for freedom and the reform of our society, we should like to acknowledge. 'Associated Movements' being published as part of the Congress Centenary Celebrations, is a tribute to the patriots in these organisations and an effort to perpetuate their memory.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'R. K. Jha', written in a cursive style.

May 6, 1985



## **PREFACE**

Several authoritative works have been published on the role of the Indian National Congress in the country's struggle for freedom. A comprehensive history of this premier organisation has also been sponsored during the centenary celebrations of the Congress. However, there have been only stray attempts to evaluate the contribution of other political organisations or movements to free our country from foreign rule. The need for a comprehensive work on the subject has been greatly felt. It was in pursuance of this long-felt need that the Centenary Celebrations Committee of the Indian National Congress under the dynamic leadership of the Prime Minister Shri Rajiv Gandhi felt that a comprehensive work on the subject might be brought out. A sub-committee with Shri G.S. Dhillon as Chairman, Shri Xavier Arakal as Convenor and Dr. P.N. Chopra as the Project Director was set up for the purpose.

It was no easy task to prepare an exhaustive list of these movements, some of which preceded the Congress while many of them were its offshoots at one stage or the other. But the leaders and members of these movements who belonged to every corner of the country made immense sacrifices for the liberation of the country. They did not belong to one religion or one caste. They rose above these narrow considerations and intense love for their motherland and a keenness to see it free permeated all their existence. That was the single thread of unity that bound them all. Their methods and means of struggle might have been different but over the decades these freedom fighters worked hard with the same dedication, singleness of purpose and solidarity. This is one chapter of our history which will inspire the generations to come.

It was a difficult task to find competent scholars to whom this work could be entrusted and completed within the stipulated period. In spite of these handicaps, I am glad to say that we were able to complete the work much ahead of schedule, thanks to the cooperation of distinguished scholars who had lent to these volumes the benefit of their profound scholarship.

It was indeed a challenging task for the Editor to scrutinise the contributions of over two dozen scholars, verify the facts, introduce uniformity and also avoid overlapping as far as possible. I have tried to make the minimum possible alterations in the original write-ups.



## **ASSOCIATED MOVEMENTS**

**The views expressed are, therefore, naturally of the authors and not of the Editor or of the Centenary Celebrations Committee of the Congress.**

**This work is being published in three volumes. The present volume, the first in the series, deals with the Home Rule Movement, Swarajya Party, Congress Socialist Party, Forward Bloc and All-India States Peoples' Conference. It is hoped that these volumes written in a lucid and readable style will acquaint our younger generations with the heroic deeds of our patriots and inspire them.**

**I would like to express my deep gratitude to our Prime Minister Shri Rajiv Gandhi without whose patronage and keen interest this work might not have been completed. He has very kindly spared time to write a foreword to the work. I am also grateful to Smt. Sheila Kaul, former Education Minister, now Convenor of the Monitoring and Implementation Committee of the Congress for her valuable suggestions for the improvement of the work. I am grateful to my younger colleague, Dr. T.R. Sareen for assisting me in the preparation of this volume. My thanks are also due to Dr. Agam Prasad, for the expeditious publication of this work.**

*New Delhi*  
**4 May 1985**

**P.N. Chopra**

## **INTRODUCTORY NOTE**

**In the Battle of Plassey in 1757 the British laid the foundation for their empire and imperial domain over India. It was by no means an end to the sparkles of Indian urge for freedom nor did it extinguish the fire from the Indian minds for ever for a free India from the foreign yoke. There were many isolated but courageous and defiant outbursts, revolts and rebellions, conspiracies and movements in many parts of the country against the British imperialism, but they were brutally suppressed with iron hand and by the Machiavellian policy of "divide and rule". Many movements at different times and places, motivated by national pride and fervour, dignity and valour even before the birth of the Indian National Congress in 1885, were engaged in the supreme heroic deeds of delivering the country from the foreign rule. The foreigners came to India primarily for trade and adventure but later conquered the land and the people for their Empire and mercilessly plundered it by force. The East India Company which ruled the country until 1858 did not have an easy or undisturbed period over the land and sea, but these patriotic struggles could not achieve their much desired objective of freeing their country from the bondage due to the lack of countrywide organisation or leadership until the birth of the Indian National Congress in 1885. Nevertheless they provided both men and women of great heroic deeds, stoic sacrifices, patriotic spirits and noble idealism throughout. Subsequent to the birth of the Congress many such movements were associating shoulder to shoulder with the Congress to liberate the sacred motherland from the British clutches. Unlike the Congress movement, these were confined to certain areas or leaders, manifesting its urge for freedom. There were long-drawn struggles for justice, liberty, equality and fraternity in this great land.**

**The peasants, labourers and the Indian masses began to march in unison all over India. The English educated Indians began to mobilize the masses and invoke the sentiments of nationalism and patriotism in an unprecedented manner with great zeal. The pioneers in the social reform field were Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj, and Kumaran Asan Movement, which began to usher the spirit of reawakening all over India. These contributed towards the evolution of a united democratic temper and political ethos. Further augmenting the national will for**

self-assertion and determination there were several other movements in the 19th century inspiring and invoking national spirit, pride and unity in the masses. Thus, the spirit and essence of the associated movements for the freedom of the country began to sprout in a remarkable manner many a time under the aegis of the Congress in every nook and corner of the country soon.

This dynamic trend and leadership witnessed two means to the end namely, violent and non-violent in the 20th century. The revolutionary movement's activities initially swelled to such an extent that the authorities both in India and England began to ask themselves "will our rule last"? Though the Congress wedded to non-violence disowned the methods adopted by the extremists yet they hold a place of honour in India's history of freedom struggle.

Officially unattached with the Congress there were several notable movements like the Home Rule Movement (separately led by Annie Besant and Tilak), the Revolutionary Movement, the Khudai Khidmatgar Movement etc. all over the country. In a way all these were the tributaries of a powerful current, determined by a moving national spirit and sacrifice to emancipate the motherland at any cost. In contrast there were branches of the Congress giving the general impression of nationalist urge in different ways, but never deviated from the common aim for liberation.

These movements vividly depict the splendour of the great spectrum of India's epic struggle for freedom with originality and vitality. They aligned with Indian National Congress in action and objectives. We see in these movements an evolution of ideas and ideologies, conflicts and contrasts, action and programme, in unison with the Indian National Congress for freedom of India. This is a unique phenomena in the history of freedom movement. Indeed they recapitulate the whole vitality and vision, bravery and sacrifice, dedication and determination, of various movements of the past to liberate India from foreign yoke.

These movement have left an indelible stamp in the hearts and minds of all. They are the milestones in the path to freedom. The great saga of freedom struggle is full of patriotism, sacrificial deeds and actions of many men and movements, inspiring national feelings, creating national integration, arousing patriotic spirits, making Indians proud of their national heritage. This is the legacy of the past to the present and the future. We intend to preserve and protect these and many other annals of associated movements for the generations yet to come. This will definitely sanctify those martyrs of yesterday who laid down their precious life for the noble cause of motherland. We hope that this will be a befitting tribute to the patriotic Associated Movements and the personalities that led them.

**Xavier Arakal**

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## HOME RULE MOVEMENT

### **The Background**

Usually a call for a new or renewed public agitation is the reaction of certain events. The political situation in India, which caused considerable worry in the early 1880s to the Viceroy, Lord Dufferin, as also to Hume, who founded the Indian National Congress in 1885, was brewing with violence. The seething discontent that prevailed was to remove the British ruling authority and free the country from alien rule. Hume claimed that he had positive proof in his possession of another revolt (like that of 1857) in the offing. To quote him, "the evidence convinced me that we were in imminent danger of a terrible outbreak (of revolt)." And an organization, like the Congress, was conceived as a "safety valve". These two words becoming historic, were used by terror-stricken Viceroy himself. The Congress was intended to attract restless patriotic spirit to agitate for the Indians' right to freedom through constitutional means—violence was no remedy for it would yield no results.

Similar was the situation in the years preceding the Home Rule Movement. India was seething with discontent, which was finding its way in the form of violence. The World War I had begun (1914), and the involvement of the British in the war provided an opportunity to strike at the seemingly disintegrating empire. The hammering delivered by some patriotic Indians with the help of some foreigners may not have ultimately led them to their goal, but what was apparently satisfying was the fact that they caused no small setback in the ruler's war efforts.

Before we meet the stormy figure, Mrs. Annie Besant, and come to her Home Rule Movement, let us have an idea of the situation to which she intended to provide a constitutional alternative—a workable alternative to give vent to the feelings of longing for freedom.

The terrorism or revolutionary activities, which began in the last decade of the nineteenth century, had in the next decade enlarged their scope and area and become very alarming to the ruling authority. But for the sake of rigid relevance, it will be desirable to restrict the brief account to what happened a year or two before the War and during it.

Of the many Indians with the overflowing fervour of patriotism, the most prominent was Har Dayal. After a course of study at the Punjab University, Har Dayal had proceeded to England in 1905 to complete his education at Oxford, holding a state scholarship, which he had won as an extremely brilliant student. In England, his ideas got transformed, and to be honest to himself, he surrendered the scholarship, stating that he disapproved of the English system of education. In 1908, he returned to India and held a class in Lahore for preaching that the British rule in India should be ended by a general boycott. He worked for a passive resistance movement. In 1911, moving to San Francisco, he proceeded further towards extremism and undertook the task of educating Indians in the ideology of revolt. He addressed meetings and organized associations sworn to destroy British rule. In November 1913, Indians from different parts of the USA met in a conference and formulated policies to be acted upon. Then the Ghadar party came into being with a membership of 5,000 and 62 branches in the United States and Canada. Har Dayal was secretary of the party and Sohan Singh Bhakna its president. In Japan, a branch of the party was set up by Barkatullah, in Shanghai by Muthura Singh, and in Hong Kong by Bhagwan Singh. Similar activities began in several other countries of the East.

World War I was impending, and therein lay Har Dayal's opportunity. At a meeting held at Sacramento on 31 December 1913, he expressed the view that as Germany was preparing to go to war with England it was time to get ready to go to India for the coming revolution. On 16 March 1914, the US authorities arrested him with the intention to deport him to India. But he secured his release on bail and managed to escape to Switzerland.

The Ghadar Party's message (particularly Har Dayal's) was carried to distant countries in different forms, and everywhere Indian residents, nurturing the feeling of being treated as people of a subjugated, rather enslaved, country, received it with hope and promise. In the spring of 1914, one Gurdatt Singh, carrying on business in the Far East, in a determined bid to defy the restrictions imposed on the Indians, sailed from Hong Kong (4 April 1914) with 351 Sikhs and 21 Punjabi Muslims in a Japanese ship, *Komagata Maru*, a name now famous in Indian history. The vessel arrived at the mouth of Hooghly on 27 September 1914. The authorities wanted to take the passengers, under restraints, to the Punjab. Being in a temper of revolutionary fervour, they adopted a defiant attitude. There was street fighting between them and the police, with the result that 18 Sikhs fell dead. Many others were taken into custody.

A month later (on 29 October 1914), another Japanese ship, *Tosa Maru* arrived with 173 Indians, mostly Sikhs. They were collected from Manila, Hong Kong, Shanghai and America; and they openly talked of the rebellion they were going to participate in. A hundred of them were

at once driven into jail; the rest managed to reach the Punjab on the appointed date (2 February 1915), which had been for compulsion the rebellion. They were followed by another batch from abroad under the leadership of a Maratha youth, Vishnu Ganesh Pingley. Emissaries were sent around to collect materials for preparing bombs. Rash Behari Bose, later came to be known as a front rank revolutionary of India, reached Amritsar just then and lived there up to the beginning of February 1915, setting up a revolutionary organization. Some young men were despatched to a few cantonments in northern India to procure military aid. According to an official statement, "bombs were prepared, arms obtained, flags made ready, a declaration of war drawn up, and instruments collected for tempering railway lines and telegraph wires."

But just when everything was ready for explosion, a spy gave the Government detailed information of the proposed plan of action. On 18 February 1914, British troops were posted in all principal towns of the Punjab. Later, 6,000 Nepalese troops were deployed over the affected parts of the province. Before any harm or damage could be done to any man or machinery of the government, the official reprisals were set in motion. While some 5,000 men or more were arrested and put on trial for treason, many others were tried by court martial and executed and quite a good number were transported for life. Internment without trial was a common feature.

Though the plan for the rebellion was undone by the swift action of government, the spirit did not die out; underground activities continued unabated and so did government action with the usual relentless and revengeful imperial methods. In one court trial, 61 persons were charged with waging war against the King; in another, the accused numbered 74, and in the third 12. These were major trials, in which 855 prosecution and 1,314 defence witnesses were examined. Out of the 147 accused, only 29 were acquitted. Among those convicted, 28 were hanged, and the rest were given transportation for life or long terms of imprisonment. It was revealed at the trials that Indian soldiers, who had revolted, had contacts in Meerut, Allahabad, Banaras, Faizabad, Lucknow and a few other places.

An attempt to persuade Indian soldiers to rise against their white masters did produce an effect, though not big enough. It began with a petty sparkle. Towards the end of December 1914, a Gujarati Muslim, Kasim Mansur, sent a letter to his son in Rangoon. Enclosed with the letter was an appeal addressed to the Turkish Consul. The disclosure made in the 'appeal' was that the Malay States Guides—one of the two regiments in Singapore—were ready to revolt against the British. The latter happened to be intercepted by the British authorities and the Malay States Guides were at once ordered to be shifted to another place. Then, as if in a revengeful provocation, the scene shifted



to the 5th Light Infantry of Singapore, manned wholly by Muslims, largely from India. The Infantry was due to leave just then for Hong Kong, and a transport was standing by to embark them. "As the battalion's ammunition was being loaded into lorries at the Alexandra Barracks, a shot was fired. An outbreak immediately followed. Those who showed signs of loyalty were shot down." The mutineers were divided into three parties. One was to overpower the sentries guarding the German internment camp and release the prisoners; the second was to attack the house of the Colonel of the 5th Infantry, and the third to prevent any assistance arriving down the road from Singapore. Lieut. Montgomerie, the Commandant of the Internment Camp, was shot dead. A terrible massacre then followed. In the fighting, a number of British officers and a few Germans were killed.

The initial success was encouraging. The mutineers now marched towards the town and killed Englishmen wherever they found them; however, in every case, the ladies were spared. It was a three-day triumph. On the fourth day British reprisals began with the arrival of new regiments and reoccupation of the lost areas. Two of the mutiny leaders were hanged and 38 were shot dead, all in public.

It was impossible to liquidate the entire Indian population in the Far East, and formation of active bodies and preparations for a determined attack continued. There were two conspiracy trials. One of the special tribunals, appointed to try the cases, held that "there can be no doubt that a conspiracy was started in 1912 and that it had for its object the freedom of India from the British *raj* by mutiny, whereby the British were to be driven out of India and the country governed by the people themselves." One can imagine how distressing would have been the slogan given by the Muslim Ghadar Party of Rangoon for the *Bakr-Id* in October. According to the slogan, on this day "English" would be killed instead of goats and cows.

It is hardly necessary to give an account of other abortive attempts at a rebellion with foreign help, mainly German; what is relevant here is the widespread feeling in India and in Indians abroad that the country should get rid of the British, and no better opportunity than the one offered by the war could ever come.

As in the earlier period of unrest, then also—before the advent of the Home Rule agitation—India had two schools of political thought, one believing in armed revolt and the other in the constitutional methods. In the latter, the Indian National Congress was the main vehicle. But the Congress, after the split of 1907, which had thrown out the extremists headed by Bal Gangadhar Tilak, was in the hands of the moderates and appeared too weak to be a match as a constitutional agitator, against the mighty force of armed intervention. The seven years preceding the arrival of Annie Besant on the political scene (1914), are remarkable for

the rising tempers on the constitutional side and worry of the authorities at the excited expressions, oral or written. The year 1907 was considered very inauspicious to the government, according to official reporters. It was the fiftieth anniversary of the 1857 mutiny. The mounting terrorism and extremist's agitation led by Tilak were making the Vicetory, Lord Minto, nervous as is apparent from one of his letters to the Secretary of State, Morley. The letter read : "We feel that we are mere sojourners in the land, only camping and on the march." And Morley's reaction was : "Your way of putting this helps me to realize how intensely artificial and unnatural is our mighty Raj, and it sets one wondering whether it can possibly last. It surely cannot, and our only business is to do what we can to make the next transition, whatever it may turn out to be, something of an improvement."

To an imperial authority repressive measures had been the only remedy, and these were adopted by the Government of India with a view to terrorising the people. The terrorists with bombs had appeared in different parts of the country, and Tilak, though committed to non-violence, wrote in his weekly : "Some people pay attention to the evil effects of a vice firmly established in the body only when that vice begins to inflict trouble upon the body in the shape of a terrible abscess ; and an effort is then made to remove the vice. The terrible murders that took place in Ireland spontaneously rivetted England's attention to the grievances of that country, and then Home Rule for Ireland began to be discussed."

Again, he wrote in another issue : "...it is true that long foreign domination has mostly quelled the spirit of the people, but it has not become altogether extinct. A knowledge of history has kindled in their minds a strong desire for *Swarajya*, and if there is no gradual fruition of that desire, some of them at all events will not hesitate to commit deeds of violence in a fit of exasperation and despair. We, along with other newspapers, have frankly told Government that if they resorted to Russian methods of repression, Indians too shall have to imitate the Russian revolutionaries in their defence."

Tilak, whom Sir Valentine Chirol of *The Times* described as "father of Indian unrest," was looked upon by Government as the principal leader of the national upsurge. The Government of Bombay and the Central Provinces, where Tilak's exhortations were making considerable impact on the people, were having his writings and speeches closely examined to make out a case for his prosecution. Eventually in the summer of 1908, a case was made out, and the much sought-after prosecution was launched against him.

The press law, as it stood at the time, did not help Government to secure a conviction, if the trying judge acted with judicial honesty. As a Secretary to the Government of India suggested : "It is most import-

ant that the case against Tilak should be strengthened, for the present charge is a very weak one, and even if it ends in conviction, which is improbable, we shall have an outcry from a large section of the radical party at home against a law under which an editor can be sent to jail for criticism, which in England would be regarded as of quite a mild type. On the other hand, the incitement to the use of bombs, which appears in the article of June 9, would excite no sympathy in England among any section of politicians whose opinions count."

The charges could not be augmented, and yet, determined as the Government was, Tilak was to be shut up in prison for a long time. The reputation of British judiciary was at stake, apparently it was tarnished in the conviction and consequent award of punishment. Characterised by the prosecution as the "most dangerous rebel," Tilak was sentenced to six years' transportation. The judge said: "Having regard to your age and other circumstances, I think it is most desirable in the interest of peace and order and in the interest of the country, which you profess to love, that you should be out of it for some time." He was sent to Burma, where (in the Mandalay prison) he passed six years.

The peace and order, of which the judge arrogantly talked, were seriously disturbed in the Presidency of Bombay as the sentence became known. The disturbances lasted several weeks. And the sanctity of the judiciary slipped down to the lowest point when most Indian and some British papers frankly accused the judge of partiality. The socialist leader of England, H.M. Hyndman, wrote in the *Justice* of England: "...The conviction of the noble patriot and martyr, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, was as gross a miscarriage of justice as has ever been known even under our carpetbagger despotism in India. There is no justice for Indians." The penal provisions under which Tilak was convicted and sentenced existed before and continued to exist later, but never were they interpreted in the way Judge Davar (presiding over the trial) did. He was, in public speeches, openly accused of acting on the dictation of the Government.

Made meak and humble by the circumstances and by the determined effort to shut out its extremist members, the Congress for seven or eight years, did not reflect completely the people's feelings. After the split of 1907, it allowed only such associations as were of the compromising moderate school to be the electoral colleges for election of Congress delegates. No extremist of the Tilak school was to be allowed entry into the Congress. For the first time, a Crown representative—the Governor of Madras—attended the 1914 session of the Congress and participated in its proceedings. As he entered the pavilion, the congregation stood up to greet him. Immediately the session's main resolution, expressing loyalty to the Throne, was moved; the time for moving it was so arranged as to synchronise with the arrival of the Governor. Tilak, who had since completed his term and returned to India, wanted the Congress to amend

its constitution so as to reallow the extremists (also called 'nationalists') to enter the national body. He was supported for the amendment by Annie Besant who had just then joined the Congress, but the Moderates, with their overwhelming majority, rejected the amendment.

The humility continued ; nay, next year (1915) it added to itself. That year's Congress was presided over by Sir Satyendra Prasanna Sinha, who, in his presidential address, said : "Even if the English nation was willing to make us an immediate free gift of full self-government—and those who differ most from the Congress are the first to deny the existence of such willingness—I take leave to doubt whether the boon would be worth having as such, for it is a commonplace of politics that nations, like individuals, must grow into freedom, and nothing is so baneful in political institutions as prematurity; nor must we forget that free India can never be ancient India restored." All that the Congress wanted, as stated in the resolution it adopted, was a substantial measure of reform towards the attainment of self-government.

The degeneration of the Congress by 1915 can be imagined by an outstanding event of the session : Mahatma Gandhi, who had returned to India after many a heroic struggle in South Africa, sought election as a member of the subjects committee ; the Moderate electorate would not have him, and he was defeated.

Even G.K. Gokhale, adorned in the history of the freedom movement as a great leader, had thrown his weight against Tilak and the men of his thinking. What compelled Tilak to put up a separate organization—Home Rule League—independent of the Congress to carry on his mission, is to be found clearly summed up in a letter (14 December 1914) Gokhale wrote to Bhupendra Nath Basu, President of that year's Congress : "Mr. Tilak has told Mr. Subba Rao frankly and in unequivocal terms that though he accepts the position laid down in what is known as the Congress creed, viz., that the aim of the Congress is the attainment by India of self-government within the Empire by constitutional means, he does not believe in the present methods of the Congress, which rest on association with Government where possible, and opposition to it where necessary. In place of these he wants to substitute the method of opposition to Government—pure and simple within constitution limits, in other words a policy of Irish obstruction,...Mr. Tilak wants to address only one demand to the Government here and to the British public in England, viz., for the concession of self-government to India, and till that is conceded, he would urge his countrymen to have nothing to do with either the public services or legislative councils and local and municipal bodies. And by organizing obstruction to Government in every possible direction within the limits of the laws of the land, he hopes to be able to bring the administration to a standstill and compel the authorities to capitulate. This is briefly his programme, and he says

that he wants to work for its realization through the Congress, if he and his followers are enabled to join it, or failing this, by starting a new organisation to be called the National League."

Nothing is more deceptive in politics than a lull, even of a short duration. The period between Tilak's transportation and release, in which not only the constitutional variety of political agitation had lost all vigour but even the bomb-bearing terrorists had slumped to a lower degree, misled the British into believing that Indian agitational and warring spirit had been sealed for a long time to come. The deceptive appearance was taken as convincingly assuring, and in June 1912 the Secretary of State for India, Lord Crewe, arrogantly declared in Parliament: "There is a certain section in India, which looks forward to a measure of self-government approaching, that which has been granted to the Dominions. I see no future for India on these lines. The experiment of extending a measure of self-government practically free from parliamentary control to race which is not our own, even though that race enjoys the services of the best men belonging to our race, is one which cannot be tried. . . . Is it conceivable that at any time an Indian empire could exist on the lines, say of Australia and New Zealand, with no British officials and no tie of creed and blood which takes the place of these material bonds?...To me that is a world as imaginary as Atlantis."

Crewe's 'imaginary' did not last even five years. In August 1917, his successor, Lord Montagu announced—and the forum was the same place (Parliament)—that "the policy of His Majesty's Government is. . . progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire."

Between the years of these two memorable announcements (1912 and 1917) occurred the events, which had given themselves the name of the Home Rule Movement. In the case of Tilak, the movement was just a resumption of the activities, which had been interrupted for half a dozen years. To extend the movement to a wider area than Tilak had been able to reach was the task of Annie Besant. Let us acquaint ourselves with that stormy petrel.

### **Mrs. Besant—Preparings to Lead**

The Irish had been waging a vailent battle against the English—the rulers, of course—and Annie Wood, as she was known till her marriage, owed her birth to an Irish couple. To be precise, her mother was "of pure Irish descent" and her father was Irish by his mother's side. The father died of consumption, when she was five years old. Keenly intellectual and splendidly educated, with a mastery of French, Italian, German, Spanish and Portuguese, as Annie speaks of his in her autobiography, he had outgrown the orthodox beliefs of his days. Her mother was, however, deeply religious. To these parents, she was born on

1 October 1847.

In 1866, after a thorough education in Germany and England, she was introduced to a clergyman, Rev. Frang Besant, a young Cambridge don, whom she married after a brief courtship. But the events leading to a disconcert between the couple soon began. In 1867, she was introduced to Roberts, styled as the 'Poor man's lawyer,' to radical politics. Though in 1869 a son was born and in 1870 a daughter, since the very first year of the marriage she had been feeling uneasy. She was no more a devout Christian, entertaining many doubts as to the Christian Gospels. Radical in thinking and eager to contribute her mite to doing something, she was finding herself misfit as a clergyman's wife. And then, as she wrote later : "We were an ill-mated couple from the very outset ; he, with very high ideas of a husband's authority and a wife's submission, and I, accustomed to freedom, indifferent to home details, impulsive, hot-tempered and proud as Lucifer." And by 1873 the marriage tie was broken.

It was not a riddance of an incongruous husband, nor a desire to go in for another. The separation, to her, was an opportunity to be in tune with her convictions, with her heart's desire to carrying the convictions into fruitful results, as far as possible. Being called as Mrs. Besant all her life, she joined the Free Thought Society in 1874 to work with Charles Bradlaugh, whose devotion to public causes she immensely liked. There was charm in Bradlaugh's edicts : "You must not think you know a subject until you are acquainted with all that the best minds have said about it. . . . No steady work can be done in public unless the worker studies at home far more than he talks outside. . . . Be your own harshest judge; listen to your own speech and criticise it; read abuse of yourself and see what grains of truth are in it."

With overflowing energy, she engaged herself in different vocations of public service—as a journalist, as an author, as a pamphleteer, as a speaker, as a servant of the weak and the needy. How profusely she wrote was an amazement to her contemporaries. Her indirect connection with India can be traced to the year 1878, when she produced a book entitled *England, India and Afghanistan*. The book was a revelation of her concern for India. She condemned the British conquest and subjugation of India. She accused the British of misrule and of impoverishing the country of a highly superior civilization. She admired the pre-British India's land system, local self-government and other institutions and customs and pleaded for their restoration. She told the British:

"Do not only proclaim that Indians shall be eligible for the high places of the State ; place them there. Let Indian judges administer justice; let Indian officers rise to high command; let the Indians be taken into the ruling council, and let the imposition of

taxation pass into native hands."

Reminiscent of her fiery oratory, later during her Home Rule agitation in India, there occurs the following paragraph in her book :

"Our fate is in our own power. Alas! that the moulding of it has been placed, by our own folly, in the hands of an Empress, inheriting the petty autocratic pride of German princelings, and of a clever and unscrupulous statesman, dazzled by the glitter of military imperialism, and the guards of a pompous Court."

Descending to a cool advice, she said : "Let the old genius of native rule be revived, and let a system of representative government gradually replace the centralised despotism of our present sway."

The monarchical England was not hostile to the free flow of new ideas, one of which was socialism. A full-fledged social worker by now, Annie Besant in 1880 was ardently attracted to it. The man who inspired her was Henry M. Hyndman, whom she described as one of the most "self-sacrificing advocates of socialism." From Bradlaugh, who had no liking for the new creed, to Hyndman, an ardent one, Annie's journey was one of a revolutionary change. She saw the imperial Britain, with a vast empire the like of which the world had not seen before, still treating its factory workers like slaves. As one goes into the history of their plight, perhaps worse than their counterparts in India, one finds that the exploiters of India were no better at home. She visited the slums and published a pathetic account of what she saw :

"The cry of starving children was ever in my ears, the sobs of women poisoned in lead works, exhausted in nail works, driven to prostitution by starvation, made old and haggard by ceaseless work."

To her the evil lay in the system and the remedy in changing that system. And she exhorted the workers to struggle for such a change. In a resolution to the Fabian Society, she proposed (17 September 1886) that "socialists should organize themselves as a political party for the purpose of transferring into the hands of the whole working community full control over the soil and means of production, as well as other production and distribution of wealth."

Soon there appeared a kind of rehearsal of what happened in India during her Home Rule Movement. The economic depression of 1886-87, resulting in unemployment and labour trouble, led to a clash between the government inclined towards the employers, and the socialist workers. Baton charge on the processions of workers became frequent, and at one time 130 of them were admitted into hospitals with baton injuries.

Nealry a hundred were arrested. In the forefront of those leading the movement was Annie, and of those who admired her, the tallest was Bernard Shaw. He said : "She all but killed herself with overwork in looking after the prisoners and organizing on their behalf a Law and Liberty League." The League provided the prisoners with legal help and became a rallying point for the sufferers.

Walking on a winding road, changing according to a new light dawning upon her and beginning as a keen radical and atheist pamphleteer, in 1889 she became, under the influence of Madame Blavatsky, a fellow of the Theosophical Society. Rightly did Bernard Shaw remark on her new interest : "Mrs. Besant is a woman of swift decisions." Her fame in England had made her known in India also, and in 1892 Indian theosophists sent her an invitation for her lectures at the Adyar Convention. She could not go then, but India was very much in her mind, and she arrived in the country of her new adoption in 1893. Colonel H.S. Olcott, the founder of the Theosophical movement, hailed her (vide his *Old Diary Leaves*) as being sent to India by "Rishis to fructify the seeds, which had been planted by the Theosophical Society in India during the previous fifteen years."

That two decades later, she would lead a movemet in India for Home Rule was nowhere in her mind nor in that of any other person connected with her. Hindu scriptures had, of course, attracted her, but her interest was wholly to be limited to theosophy. She travelled 6,000 miles in the country, and during her visits to different places, Indian glory of the past became a passion with her. Poetic were the expressions in the addresses presented to her. Here is an example of the one presented to her at Berhampore (West Bengal) on 18 January 1894 :

"Welcome sister, the ever unfortunate mother India takes you to her bosom. Now she has nothing precious of which she can make a present to you; but she is ready to receive you with *Shamit* (sacrificial fuel), *Kushasan* (seat made of sacrificial grass), *Padya* (water for washing the feet with), *Arghya* (respectful oblation) and sweet words. What has brought you sister here ? India is now lifeless. . . . We, the inhabitants of Berhampore, give a garland of flowers round your neck; please take it, simple sister, with your characteristic affability. You are now a learned daughter of mother India, you are honoured throughout the world. We are glad to see you."

Annie was overwhelmed and felt as if India was her motherland in her previous birth and that she belonged to the Indian people. She spoke of India as "the origin of all religions, the mother of spirituality, the cradle of civilization." The India that she loved was the India whose "polity was built by king-initiates and whose religion was moulded by



divine men."

Detached from active politics, she remained, no doubt, more than two decades, but the views she held and expressed in her book, *England, India and Afghanistan*, positively indicated that it was impossible for a person of her feelings and her actions to keep wholly aloof. She was gradually drifting towards incidents and affairs where her zeal was bound to be looked upon with disfavour, rather with anxiety, by Government. In the very nature and temperament that she possessed, theosophy could not be her exclusive interest; and she shifted a major part of her attention to Indian education—establishing schools and colleges and coming directly in touch with students and other young people. Besides moral education, what inspiring message could they—the students and others—receive from her except the aspiration for Home rule. That obviously was politics, without her association with any political organization.

The first occasion for Government to take serious notice of her utterances appeared in January 1910. The occasion was the anniversary celebration of the Central Hindu College, Benares, established by herself. She addressed "An Appeal" to Government and to Europeans: "We, who have charge of nearly one thousand lads in the Central Hindu College and who influence tens and thousands all over India, we who are straining every nerve to sow in these young hearts love of the motherland and of the empire, we who seek to win them to love England by making the English lovable, we who love India and hope to see her a self-government party of the mighty empire, we appeal to the Government of India not to allow this work of love and service to be wrecked by brutality and folly."

There was nothing objectionable in the Appeal, but in the then thinking of the authorities the mere expression of love for motherland was considered potential enough to excite nationalism. An action against Annie was contemplated but it had to be dropped on the intervention of Gokhale. The matter could not, in the very nature of things, end there. The college magazine regularly carried an exhortation from her, and the Commissioner of the Benaras Division, H.V. Lovett, reported to the Government that Mrs. Besant was unworthy of the confidence with which she had been treated and that she should no longer be allowed to use the magazine for her political propaganda. The Viceroy, Lord Minto, agreeing with the Commissioner, wrote back that the college magazine needed constant watching. "I believe", he said, "she finds it necessary to abuse Government occasionally."

In the absence of Tilak, the six years (of his gaol term) would have been, with the Congress reduced to humbleness, dull and drab had not Annie Besant filled the vacuum and done so with equal challenge to the rulers. Their hope that with Tilak's banishment they had given themselves a period of 'peace' was completely frustrated. Her audiences and

her readers received a continuing stimulant from her. At times her characterization of the Raj was enjoyable. Here is a sample : "The crowd of officials veils the Crown, and the Monarch is hidden behind a mass of clerks. The Viceroy with his five years' term, appointed in England for political reasons, appears more as the head clerk of a great system of clerks than as a symbol of an Emperor, and he cannot rouse the personal loyalty, which in India means power."

On the authority of Dadabhai Naoroji and even some Englishmen, including members of Parliament, she would assert that the British rule had given India "famines and poverty by cutting at the very roots of its indigenous economic system." She endeavoured to create hatred for England's "political economy", "To sell the corns in the years of plenty", she would say, "and to starve in the years of scarcity might be modern political economy but it was pure idiocy."

Paradoxically a public expression of Britain's economic exploitation of India was first made in England, and it was done with figures worked out in a kind of research work. Such an expression in England was one thing—a thing of little worry to the authorities of 'law and order' in India—it was wholly different to tell Indian masses how they were being exploited by their white rulers. That the facts and figures should be widely made known and that their public expression irritated the authorities became a point with political agitators to be utilised against a sensitive government. With all her characteristic sincerity, Annie Besant would say in her public speeches : The officers and other men recruited in Britain to serve in India went there not to make the country their home, not "to sympathise with the people among whom they lived; they went there to make money, longing for the time to return and spend the same at home". She deprecated the "abnormally high salaries" paid to them and the huge amount of money taken every year to England as "Home Charges".

There was a difference between the resolutions on the 'economic ruin', adopted earlier from year to year by the Congress at its annual sessions, and their ventilation at public forums in different parts of the country. For the latter the credit goes to Mrs. Besant. Mahatma Gandhi's mass movement was built on the realization of the 'economic ruin', but Mrs. Besant was certainly the forerunner. Apt it would be to quote Gandhi here—the esteem in which he held her : "When I was studying in London in 1888 and after, I had become, like many like me, an admirer of Bradlaugh and Besant. Imagine my excitement when one fine morning I read in the London press that Annie Besant had become a Theosophist under Blavatsky's inspiration. . . . I would have been more than satisfied if I could have touched the hem of the garments of Madame Blavatsky and her distinguished disciple. . . . When Dr. Besant came to India and captivated the country, I came in close touch with her, and though the political differences, my veneration for her did not suffer abatement."

Similar was her effect on Jawaharlal Nehru : "It has been a very great privilege for me to have worked with her to some extent, for undoubtedly she was a dominating figure of the age. India especially owes a very deep debt of gratitude for all she did to enable her to find her own soul."

Verily, it was India's soul, the ancient grandeur, on which she stressed again and again. She would assert that if India was again to hold up her head among the nations, India's young children must begin to lay the foundation in their own life of the Aryan type of character. Like Raja Rammohun Roy and Rishi Dayanand Saraswati, she asked the people to regain what they had lost under foreign domination. Coming from the West, she would deprecate the western way of social and political life : "India must rediscover her soul".

She, thus, gave out the broad hints of the kind of Home Rule she visualised for India. Behaving like an Indian of the ancient times—'Hindu' in modern language—and living like that in her private life, a question could naturally be asked, as it was indeed done in some quarters—how her concept of the politically free India of the future would fit in a country of several religions, each with quite a big following. Would the Muslims, for example, be attracted to her, when she believed and openly said that it was the revival of religions in the East, the revival of Zoroastrianism, the revival of Buddhism, which made possible the birth of nationality and development of national consciousness? To her the revival of religion was the first and necessary foundation of all moral growth. And one recalled, in amusement, the initial public-life period of Mrs. Besant's life, when she was an enthusiastic atheist.

One of the peculiarities of Indian politics then was the practical aloofness of the Muslims, as a community, from the agitation for self-government. The Muslim League, born in 1906, could not of course, be said as the sole representative of the Muslims, but few Muslims—the number being always negligible—joined the Congress or later the Home Rule League. This attitude presented the spectacle of Hindus being everywhere in political activity to the exclusion of men and women of other religions. Despite the continuing communal approach of the Muslim League as also of other leading Muslims, the Congress did not deviate from its secular approach. Never did Hinduism figure anywhere at its platform and in its resolutions as having anything to do with the democratic institutions of its vision. But persons like Annie Besant would appear vindicated by the provisions later made in the 1950 constitution of free India: one would be free to follow any religion, but in state affairs religion would have no influence.

While Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, who was the first to exhort the Muslims to go in for the English system of education, preached loyalty to the empire and aloofness from the agitational politics of the Congress,

Mrs. Besant gave a wholly different message, and it was assimilated practically by the whole of Hindus. She felt that the atmosphere obtaining in most of the educational institutions, was not conducive to the growth of patriotism, and that patriotic feelings could not be developed in the schools and colleges under the management of missionaries or government. And she called upon the people to start national institutions. (It may be recalled that Congress Nationalists—the so-called extremists—had, much earlier begun doing so.) Whether the call was given by the early nationalists or later by Annie, the response in either case came from the Hindus. That phenomenon, let it be understood, did not in the least affect the Congress secular approach in the field of education. Mrs. Besant's philosophy, in the ultimate result, was in consonance with this approach. One of the public bodies she had established in her early career was the Secularist Party.

More than matching the long strides Annie was making towards her vigorous campaign under the banner of the Home Rule League were those made by the revolutionary extremists in the Middle East and Far East, in the USA and other countries (referred to earlier). Wedded to the constitutional method, she now included in her exhortations the message that the people of India should not take to terrorism. She hoped that eventually self-rule would come out of intensive constitutional activities. That was the purpose of the Home Rule Movement.

#### **Tilak—Exciting Unrest and Discontent**

In rapid surveys of the Indian struggle for freedom, the Home Rule Movement is usually associated with the name of Annie Besant, but actually Tilak preceded her almost in every activity that she carried forward in his absence and continued even after his return. As far back as 1895 'the Home Rule Bill for India' was circulated under his inspiration. But the political temper at that time, on the side of the constitutional variety of politics, was far behind his thinking, and the momentum did not develop.

Tilak, therefore, devoted his weeklies (*Kesari* in Marathi and *Mahratta* in English) to arousing a feeling of discontent. The *Shastras* were quoted to affirm that discontent led to prosperity. It was the discontent, which in the language of the Indian Penal Code was punishable as 'disaffection' against the government. The period between the year of the publication of the Home Rule Bill (1895) and the year of his confinement (1908) in a solitary cell in Mandalay was a spell of his intensive effort to prepare the people for a massive upsurge for Home Rule.

The idea of 'National Education' to prepare the youth for *Swarajya* was first mooted by him, and its implementation too, though restricted in scope, was also started by him. Mrs. Besant only picked up the thread in his absence. The more important items in his programme of

propaganda and action were 'boycott of foreign goods' and adoption of '*swadeshi*'. He focussed the people's attention on the evils of British rule, one of which was the state-arranged drinking. The rulers were looking for new avenues of income, and one of the items they hit upon was the excise revenue. The result was that state-regulated liquor shops sprang up, and their number went on increasing. Tilak's Temperance Movement was his answer to fight the evil. Never in India had the ruling power involved itself in the encouragement of drink, and the Movement became one of the propaganda points to shake up the people and to make them *Swarajya*-conscious.

After the 1907 fiasco at the Surat Congress, which had resulted in the expulsion of Tilak and Tilakites from the national organization, he organised district conferences and a provincial conference to disseminate his message. The theme of 'national education', later on taken up by Mrs. Besant, was unnerving to the authorities. He would say in his harangues : "The question of national education is peculiar to India as being a country in which the interests of the rulers and the ruled are conflicting. The name of *Swarajya* is forbidden in the schools set up by Government. Under the name of discipline, everything likely to teach boys about national salvation is denied to them, both in Government and aided schools. Text-books in other countries taught that it was glory to die for one's nation; it was not so in the case of the text-books in India."

There is no greater obstacle to a campaign for self-rule than the docility of the people themselves. Such docility, let it be frankly admitted, was abundant when Tilak undertook the task of educating them. Weak in health but unafraid of the penal action constantly hanging over his head, he transcended the border line of the imperialist law to infuse courage into the people. The people should grow restless for *Swarajya*. And he would tell them : "we have been reduced to poverty under British rule. Formerly our rulers, both Hindus and Mohammedans, used to look to the welfare of their subjects. If a ruler does not care for his subjects, how can he be sovereign ? For what are we to pay him taxes ? What right has he to expect taxes from us ? The first days of British rule dazzled us by its glamour, but we have now come to see its deceptiveness. Government has granted us liberty to drink, but other liberties we do not enjoy. The present Government of India is a mighty government, but if our own people, who carry out its behests, refuse to help it, it will not be able to go on. If a rule becomes intolerable, it is everyone's duty to obstruct its operation. He who has set his face towards the temple of the Goddess of Independence will never approve of independence under British suzerainty."

Tilak's speeches, of which the above is a sample, make the difference between his approach and that of Annie Besant quite glaring. She took

scrupulous care in her utterances to stress on a lasting political connection between India and the Empire : her Home Rule was to be a rapid realization of self-government with India remaining part of the Empire. To Tilak political connection with the British was unnatural, and as such to be scrapped as soon as possible. Tilak preached non-cooperation; Annie Besant steered clear of such a confrontation. Tilak, while deploring the bomb explosions and other kinds of violent activity, rising in volume after the Partition of Bengal (1905), openly declared that such occurrences would continue as long as the causes giving rise to them, continued. Annie did not take such a conditional view of the terrorist politics. To the authorities, Tilak was the 'most dangerous rebel', and Annie the most inconvenient agitator, though at times alarming, too.

Annie was never accused by Government of inciting violence, but Tilak was, and Government did so rather ungraciously through a London journalist, Valentine Chirol of *The Times* (later decorated with Knighthood). Chirol said in his articles (subsequently published in the form of a book, *The Indian Unrest*) that while bomb-throwers and murderers of some officials had been hanged, the man (Tilak) whose articles in his weeklies provoked them to do the fatal deed, was not taken to task. (That Chirol wrote on the invitation of the Government of India and with the material supplied by it remained a hidden fact until after the British departure when the files were no more a secret.)

*The Times* (London), nearly always in disagreement with Tilak's politics, had editorially commented after his conviction that "Tilak remained at the moment of his conviction the most conspicuous politician in India and among large sections of the people had enjoyed a popularity and wielded an influence that no other public man in the dependency could claim to equal. The Extremists' movement in its open manifestations, both within and outside the Congress, was almost entirely his conception." That leader, when he returned as a free man in 1914, had no place in the national body. But the Congress of 1915 was, by circumstances, compelled to make a little hole in the citadel of the Moderates. The credit for the change goes to Annie Besant.

At that year's session, in the absence of the Extremists, here was the 'discordant note' which the Moderates did not relish but had to swallow because she had been allowed entry into the Congress. The preceding events, mainly of three months earlier were there on record to indicate her future course of action, but the Moderates apparently felt helpless.

Bombay was the venue of the 1915 Congress, and in that very city she had delivered a public speech making out a case for Home Rule. Two days later (25 September 1915) she made a formal announcement in her paper, *New India*, to set up the Home Rule League : "After conversation in India and correspondence with England, which have

been going on for many months and the beginning of which goes back to the discussions held last year with some English politicians and sympathisers with India, it has been decided to start a Home Rule League, with 'Home Rule' for India as its only object as an auxiliary to the National Congress here and its British committee in England, the special function of the committee being to educate the English democracy in relation to India and to take up the work, which Charles Bradlaugh began and which was prematurely struck out of his hands by death."

The new move was, to the authorities, a storm in the serene atmosphere of the constitutional politics. Since the paper containing the announcement was published from Madras, the Government of that Presidency was first to react, and recommended to the Government of India that in order "to put an end to Mrs. Besant's mischievous writings and public utterances", she should be "forced to leave India". The Madras Governor, in his letter, added: "She will, no doubt, continue her campaign in the English and American press, but we shall be spared by her ravings on the Indian platform, and her writings will lose a good deal of their danger on account of the distance between herself and her audiences."

The Home Member of the Government of India, while agreeing on the "mischievous" character of her writings and speeches, did not agree with the recommendation. "Mrs. Besant's Home Rule League is foolish and wild", he wrote back, "and I doubt whether even the National Congress will adopt it. All the calumnious attacks on the British Government, which formed the stock in trade of the extremist orators in 1907 to 1910, are fetched out again and displayed before immature students. I am not in favour of packing off the lady to Europe, but I think that she might now be warned in a formal fashion."

The feeling of comfort, entertained by the Home Member about the Congress, was confirmed at the annual session (1915). Annie Besant had by now created a following for her movement, but again and again a thought occurred to her that she was a foreigner and that it would be in the fitness of things for her Home Rule campaign to be taken up by the Congress. That was not to be. Her announcement, setting up the Home Rule League, had already alerted the Moderates. The official wish, as entertained by the Home Member, was working as an underground power wire. The Bombay delegates to the Congress, who because of their number were to be predominant at the session, gathered together to elect members for the subjects committee, and many of them expressed themselves in agreement with the wish that only such delegates should be elected as would oppose Mrs. Besant's scheme.

The session's president, Sir Satyendra, whose disinclination for immediate self-rule has been quoted in the previous pages, was already

there as a damper to any proposal of the kind of Home Rule Movement. He was apparently anxious to avoid a discussion on the subject at the open session, and this he did by nipping the matter in the bud. Unaware of the undercurrent, Besant drafted a resolution she intended to move and submitted it to the President. Sir Satyendra ruled it out, contending that it contravened article 1 of the Congress constitution, which restricted the scope of the demand for self-government by the words "by bringing about a steady reform of the existing system of administration". Nevertheless, a discussion took place at the session, the subject being to prepare a draft scheme of reforms, and a resolution was set in motion to the effect that that scheme should be referred to the All-India Congress Committee (AICC). Knowing fully well that the AICC was packed with mild Moderates, Mrs. Besant opposed the motion and demanded that the scheme should be referred to a special committee. There was a voting, and her amendment was lost by 107 to 68.

Failing to woo the Congress, the next best thing Annie thought of was to seek the association of the leading political men of the time. She announced a meeting for 27 December 1915. (The Congress was still in session.) Among the invitees to the meeting was the Congress President, Sir Satyendra also, but he was prevailed upon by the Bombay Moderates not to attend. Similar attitude was adopted by others of that school, like Chandavarkar, Wacha, Sir Ibrahim Rahimullah; Surendranath Banerjea and Madan Mohan Malaviya also kept aloof, but on a different ground, a sentimental one. They thought that the Home Rule League, as a parallel political organization, would injure the interests and prestige of the Congress. Vicissitudes were there in the journey the Congress had covered, but they would not like the effort of the thirty years in building up a national organization to be undermined. Among those who lent an enthusiastic support to Mrs. Besant, the most prominent was M.A. Jinnah.

Mrs. Besant's parallel meeting was a success, and the Moderates, arrayed against her, now moved towards some kind of rapprochement with her — a rapprochement in which the substance of their stand may not be compromised. On 29 December 1915, the Congress adopted a vague resolution appearing to accommodate part of her scheme. There was a confusion, in which the contemplated Home Rule Movement appeared to be befogged. Mrs. Besant convened another meeting with the tacit concurrence of the Congress leaders, and there a trick made the meeting a mockery. The participants consisted of some members of the AICC and the Muslim League and some others (not belonging to say of the two political parties but supporting Mrs. Besant). It was a stormy meeting, and in the prevailing uproar, the Congress members insisted that in the voting on the Home Rule League only the members of the two main political parties should be allowed to participate. In a hurry



the voting was ordered on this basis, and Mrs. Besant's proposal was defeated ! What a paradox—her proposal defeated at a meeting convened by herself !

The meeting then witnessed a spectacle that must have been amusing to Mrs. Besant, though seemingly it appeared as ignoring her. We have already noticed how keen she, as a foreigner, had been to enlist Muslim League support, and when, after endeavouring for it in different ways, she failed, she announced at the meeting that she would abide by majority opinion. The announcement appeared as if a bomb had been thrown at that group of youngmen, who as her supporters, had come to the meeting with fire and enthusiasm. They decided to proceed with organizing a Home Rule League for the province of Bombay even without her if she really meant to abide by the 'majority' verdict.

Still out of the Congress, the Poona extremists, disappointed by the Besant debacle and bitter at the Congress attitude, met in a conference under the leadership of Tilak. The conference appointed a committee of fifteen to consider the Home Rule proposal and to find an Indian Home Rule League. There were prolonged discussions, and Tilak's English weekly *Mahratta* dated 2 April 1916, came out with the following announcement :

"A conference of the Nationalists of Bombay, Central Provinces and Berar was held at Poona on the 23rd and 24th of December 1915, and it was resolved that a committee of some fifteen gentlemen be appointed to determine whether it was desirable to establish a League to obtain Home Rule for India and what steps should be taken with this object in view. The committee have reported in favour of a pioneer organization for Bombay, the Central provinces and Berar, and that the formation of an All-India League should be postponed till arrangements could be made to establish affiliated provincial organizations in all or nearly all the provinces of India."

Thus a new League came into being with Joseph Baptista as President and N.C. Kelkar as Secretary. Among the members, constituting the executive committee, were : G.S. Khaparde, Dr. B.S. Moonje, and R.P. Karandikar. Tilak did not accept any office, though the League is known in history as Tilak's Home Rule League. It is pertinent to note that, with general consensus, the object set forth was to obtain Home Rule or self-government within the British Empire by all constitutional means and to educate and organize public opinion in the country. The committee decided to enrol 10,000 members for the League, and when that had been done, to draft a Home Rule Bill, which should be moved in the House of Commons by some member of Parliament.

Tilak did not want to do anything to undermine the Congress; and

yet the establishment of a separate body was an inevitable necessity to him. In a leading article in the *Mahratta*, he explained himself the purpose thus : "It was generally recognized that the time had positively come for an organization to be started for educating public opinion and agitating for Home Rule throughout the country. The Congress was the body, which would naturally possess the greatest authority for undertaking such a work with responsibility. The scheme of self-government, which the Congress is supposed to be intending to hatch, served as a plausible excuse for most of the Moderates to negative a definite proposal to establish a Home Rule League. But the Congress, it is generally recognized, is too unwieldy to be easily moved to prepare a scheme for self-government and actively work for its practical success. The spade work has got to be done by someone. It can afford no longer. The League may be regarded as a pioneer movement, and is not intended in any sense to be an exclusive movement."

A movement was in the offing, and the official word went round asking the intelligence department sleuths to get active. Some openly and some in disguise met extremist leaders, trying to find out the shape of things to come. The Government should have known that on the constitutional side there never was any secret planning, nor was one now in respect of the Home Rule affair. But the anxiety remained : The Government should not be found lacking to meet the situation. As in 1908, Tilak was again the main target.

About the middle of 1916, Tilak undertook an extensive lecture tour for an educative propaganda and to exhort the people to become members of the Home Rule League. The speeches he made alarmed the Bombay Government particularly, because cooperation expected during the war might turn into non-cooperation.

Hardly had Tilak covered two districts—Belgaum and Ahmednagar—the Government of Bombay referred the texts of his speeches to their legal adviser to know whether he could be prosecuted under section 124-A of the Indian Penal Code. An affirmative opinion was given. According to the official assessment, "the worst of the speeches" was the one delivered at Belgaum. But Belgaum presented a difficulty. At this place the cases of similar nature had recently been withdrawn from the cognizance of justice, and the institution of proceedings there, the Government feared, might form ground for criticism. And if the case were tried at Ahmednagar, it was considered doubtful whether the Belgaum speech would be admitted there as evidence. Therefore, the possibility of taking the case direct to the High Court was discussed, and the opinions of the Remembrancer of Legal Affairs and the Advocate General were sought. The Remembrancer said : "It is clear, if the speeches are read fairly as a whole, that the speaker's real object is to vilify and ridicule the Government and to excite unrest and discontent.

The speeches are, therefore, seditious, whatever the kind of 'Home Rule' he advocated and whatever the means he proposed to employ to obtain it." Nearly the same opinion was expressed by the Advocate General.

But the doubt about a direct approach to the High Court was still lurking in official mind, and eventually the district magistrate of Poona, on instruction from the Government, served an order (22 July 1916) on Tilak telling him that he disseminated seditious matter and asking him to "show cause why he should not be ordered to execute a bond for a sum of Rs. 20,000, with two sureties each in a sum of Rs. 10,000, for his good behaviour for a period of one year." The grounds, which weighed with the Government for this change, of course, were that the procedure in a magisterial court would be simpler, the case could be heard in Poona, no difficulty would arise with regard to a jury and all the three speeches could be put in as evidence.

The hearing of the case began before the District Magistrate at 12 noon on 28 July. The public prosecutor began by emphatically saying that Tilak had previous convictions for sedition and was again orally disseminating seditious matter. This was objected to by Tilak's counsel, M.A. Jinnah, but the objection was ruled out by the Magistrate. Tilak, in his reply to the court, admitted that the CID reports of his speeches were "on the whole and generally speaking correct, although there were omissions and imperfections." The object of his speeches, he said, was to defend and explain Home Rule and to point out the best way of obtaining it and to exhort the people to become members of the Home Rule League.

Jinnah, in his powerful advocacy, defended the speeches by suggesting that they were at worst a criticism of the administration and did not amount to sedition. The Magistrate disagreed and observed in his judgment: "Looking at these speeches as a whole, fairly, freely and without giving undue weight to isolated passages, what impression do they convey to the audience to which they were addressed? The impression I gather from them is that Tilak wished to disaffect his audiences towards the Government in order that they may make up to their present unhappy condition, join his Home Rule League and help him in his agitation for a change in the administration of the country."

A jail term was avoided apparently because it was bound to be followed by large-scale disturbances. All that the magistrate, therefore, ordered was to direct Tilak to enter into bonds as already required in the earlier order of 22 July.

The bonds smacked of a penal action, and the case was taken by Counsel Jinnah to the High Court in appeal. The two judges—S.L. Batchelor and Lallubhai Shah—who constituted the bench, in their separate but concurring judgments, completely vindicated Tilak and

cancelled the magisterial order.

After getting a clear verdict from the High Court, Tilak told the workers of the League that since Home Rule, as an ideal, had been vindicated as legal and loyal, it must be proved by arguments that the demand was justified. The defects of the administration should be brought to light and the people told to work for Home Rule if they wanted their miseries to end.

But the provincial Government had several other weapons in their armouries which they duly invoked to gag Tilak.

### **Repression—An Incentive to the Movement**

Tilak's campaign elicited favourable reaction in England. A Home Rule For India League was established at 18, Tavistock Square, London, on 7 June 1916. The executive consisted of C. Janarajadasa, Murriel (Countess de la Warr), the Lady Emily Lutyens, George Sydney Arundale, (Miss) Esther Bright, John Scurr and George Lynsbury. With Major D. Graham, elected as secretary, the executive, at its first meeting, decided to print 10,000 copies of a leaflet entitled, "What India Wants ?" This was followed by repeated circulation of such leaflets. The London League, while carrying on the campaign, also proceeded to form branches or centres at different places, the membership fee being 6d. per head.

As *The Times* would on such occasions always come to the aid of of the harassed Government of India, it did so now also. But the League was not without a friendly press. The most enthusiastic reception was accorded to it by Hyndman's *Justice*. The paper, in its issue dated 22 June, wrote : "We do not know who are members of the League, nor have we seen the leaflets. But so soon as peace is proclaimed after the final defeat of the Germanic powers, we shall be glad to cooperate in a movement for the emancipation of India. We do not see how Englishmen, who proclaim that they are fighting for national freedom in Europe, can honestly continue a system of foreign despotism over 315,000,000 people in Hindustan."

The paper challenged the ex-Viceroy, Lord Hardinge's speech, made just about that time, in which he had claimed "marvellous beneficial results from our rule" to India, and (the paper) added : "It is simply not true. Moreover, so insecure is our tenure of this vast empire that Lord Lansdowne and Sir Edward Grey have entered into treaties with Japan to hold India for us in case of need. In return Japan has been given a free hand in China. We may bear in mind too that Indian troops, on the strength of those Japanese treaties, have been fighting on our side in Europe as in Asia. Home Rule in India will greatly benefit both India and England."

In India Tilak's vigorous campaign was going ahead, and so was a frequent exchange of notes between different authorities over the appre-

hensions, which the rulers entertained despite the light treatment of their case by the High Court. The District Magistrate of Poona again called him. Tilak told him that it was not his intention to produce a discontent. And when the District Magistrate reported to the Commissioner that he believed Tilak to be "in earnest in his disavowal of any intention to embarrass the Government", the Commissioner wrote back that he did not "trust Tilak's protestations and that his present activities are most undesirable".

Tilak was not unknown to the authorities, nor was the temper in which he spoke or wrote. What came as nerve-shaking to them was the unprecedented whirlwind campaign he was carrying on among the masses. The vigorous functioning of the London branch had imparted greater vigour to his tongue and pen. Here is an extract from one of his articles: "Even when war is going on in all its fierceness at a distance of a hundred miles, Home Rule for Ireland is being discussed in England. How are we to characterise the pretence of the officials that they are quite upset with the philosophical discussion of Home Rule which only breaks the death-like silence of India? We think that Home Rule should be demanded all at once." And he told the people: "Do not ask for crumbs; ask for the whole bread. If there is any method to effect political reforms without riots and without the spread of discontent, it is this. All are demanding *Swarajya*."

N.C. Kelkar, the Secretary of the League, is credited with laying down strict discipline for the League workers. The lecturers he appointed were given talking points, and they were asked to stick to a uniform pattern of propaganda. Only those who held a pass, signed by the Secretary, could speak in the name of the League. According to the instructions, the lecturers kept themselves within the limits of the law, which did not prevent criticism of the Government and which did not prevent the demand for self-rule.

But it was Tilak alone, who made the officials panicky; other lecturers and preachers were tolerated. On 20 November 1916, Tilak went on a tour of Mysore (Karnataka). At Gadag, before he had made a speech and when he was being entertained at a function, he was served with an order prohibiting him from delivering a public speech. The district authorities' restlessness did not end there; they asked him to finish with the entertainment within five minutes. But a kind of public-speaking had already been done. As he was being conducted from the railway station, a huge crowd had gathered for his reception. As the crowd formed itself into a procession, he stopped for a while and addressed them saying: "We do not want to trespass on the rights of any nation; we do not want supremacy over any people; we are only asking for what is our birthright." He made similar speeches at many other places on his way back home.

The Congress, which had been conceived by Lord Dufferin as a 'safety valve' and which, after the ups and downs of thirty years, had again been made a 'safety valve' by the Moderates' overcautiousness and officials' underground promptings, was now faced with the question-to exist or not exist in the form it had done for many years. The Home Rule League had become the centre of the people's attention. With that realization the 1916 Congress, held at Lucknow, flung open its doors to the Extremists.

Both the Congress and the Muslim League, which till 1915 appeared to the Home Rule Leaguers as being out of date, adopted at their 1916 session resolutions positively indicating an upward change. The Congress resolution said: "His Majesty the King Emperor should be pleased to issue a proclamation announcing that it is the aim and intention of the British policy to confer self-government on India at an early date." Closely resembling it was the resolution passed by the Muslim League. The so-called Lucknow Pact, which laid down the proportions of Muslim representation in different legislatures, was the result of the anxiety to settle the Hindu-Muslim question as such a settlement was a pre-requisite to the making of a united demand for self-government.

But the fervour the Home Rule Leaguers expected and the will to rouse public enthusiasm were still lacking in the leadership of the two organizations; the Home Rule League, therefore, continued functioning as a separate entity. Jinnah, who presided over the 1916 League session, was different from the overwhelming majority of the party. In his presidential address, he said: "The people have grown fully conscious of their destiny and are peacefully struggling for political freedom. This is the Indian problem in a nutshell. The task of the British statesmanship is to find a prompt, peaceful and enduring solution of this problem."

Now there were two Home Rule Leagues. The psychological setback, caused to Mrs. Besant by the Congress attitude, lasted just a while, and she returned to her old self with renewed zeal. The concept of Home Rule she developed was all-embracing: with the village in the country and ward in the town as the basic units; she proposed that every adult of 21 years of age must have a share in the control and management of public affairs. The scheme she drew up provided for these institutions: village panchayat, ward council, taluq board, municipality, district board, provincial parliament and national parliament. When she was advised by loyalists to keep quiet in the hour of England's distress, she said (as Tilak did): "Insidious onslaughts on Indians force us not to be bamboozled by this one-sided argument of not worrying the government in times of war. If the Government, taking advantage of the situation, trample upon India's hopes, aspirations and ideals, would those loyal to India and liberty-loving Britain sit with folded hands and say nothing? To those Indians who are afraid of the fight, we would quote

Sri Krishna's words to Arjuna, 'Yield not to impotence, O, Partha; stand up, Parantapa..'

And she was again an eye-sore to the authorities. In May 1916 (about a month after the formation of Tilak's Home Rule League), she went to Poona to deliver a speech on "the future of India". Large crowds wended their way to the site of the meeting despite the police attempt to dissuade them. To ensure success of the meeting, Tilak attended it, and introducing Annie Besant to the audience, said that he had great faith in her sincerity, enthusiasm and eloquence.

Mrs. Besant's headquarters were located in Madras, and the worried Governor of the Presidency was Lord Pentland. An anti-Brahman movement, supposed to be inspired and encouraged by officials, was a vital part of the Presidency's politics then. At the instance of the Governor, some officials and some anti-Brahman campaigners joined hands and undertook a counter-propaganda to assert that Home Rule was a caste affair of the Brahmans. The device had little effect, and then the Madras Government, invoking the Press Act of 1910, which had placed too many restraints on freedom of the press, called upon her to deposit a fresh security of Rs. 2,000, in respect of the press of her papers, 'The New India Printing Works'.

The forfeiture of the old security and the demand of a new one had an effect contrary to what the Government expected. Most papers of the country editorially condemned the order and sympathised with Mrs. Besant for the public service she was rendering. There were protest meetings all over the country, and there were appeals to raise money for the security. The new deposits, with the public backing behind her, did not deter her, and she went ahead with the old temper of her expression. On 25 August 1916, that security was again forfeited and a fresh one, now Rs. 10,000 was demanded. This time she challenged the demand in a local court of law. She failed there, but succeeded in an appeal at the Privy Council.

Earlier, on 29 June, she was externed by the Bombay Government. Why was she externed and then interned ? This was the question asked in Parliament by Snowden. The Secretary of State for India, replying said that she was interned under the Defence of the Real Act, under which it was not necessary to give any reason.

Mrs. Besant's Home Rule League, in a state of suspense for about a year, was formally revived with fresh impetus on 3 September 1916. Now named All-India Home Rule League, it soon spread its tentacles. In a brief period, 41 branches were started in different places. Mrs. Besant herself assumed the presidency of the central body ; and her noteworthy lieutenant, Arundale, was nominated as organising secretary. Response to her call came from distant provinces. In U.P., the leading men among those who joined her were : Motilal Nehru, Tej Bahadur Saprū

and Ishwar Saran. They were the most famous political men of the time. They were so much influenced by her that they proposed to set her up for the Presidency of the 1916 Congress. The Raja of Mahmudabad, another supporter, was so eager to have her as president that he announced a contribution of rupees one lakh as expenses of a Home Rule deputation to England should one be decided upon to be sent. Their efforts failed, and the session was presided over by A.C. Mazumdar. In U.P. the atmosphere was propitious : the extremists constituted the majority in the provincial Congress Committee. And it was because of them that the U.P. Government had issued a warning to the reception committee of the 1916 Congress that seditious speeches at the session would not be allowed.

And now we meet Gandhi, not yet widely known as Mahatma. When the Bombay Provincial Conference assembled for its annual meeting on 23 October 1916, the extremist writ against Mrs. Besant was still prevailing, and the protest resolution at the conference was moved by Gandhi and seconded by Tilak.

It proved as another pinprick, and this time to the Chief Commissioner of the Central Provinces, who on 29 October, externed her from the province. Another spate of protests followed, now more widespread and intenser. The Press Association expressed in a telegram its gratitude to her for her 'gallant fight.' On 12 November, a protest meeting was convened by Motilal Nehru, and the resolution was moved by Tej Bahadur Sapru. At the 1917 conference of the All-India Muslim League, tributes were paid to her, and she was hailed as one "mainly instrumental in bringing about the spirit of unity between the two great communities."

Mrs. Besant lamented, as later on she recorded in her Diary, that the authorities were "suppressing a political agitation so constitutionally conducted that not even the sweeping clauses of the Indian Penal Code on sedition could enmesh it...England, supposed to be the champion of liberty, is the only power in the whole wide world which seizes peaceful citizens at the whim of an autocratic executive, interns them in a stated area, allows no communication to pass between them and the outside world save through a magistrate or police official...England under the eyes of Europe and America dramatically releases the Irish prisoners, many of them held for armed rebellion ; on the very day she interned three persons in India."

The same argument was on her side, and a number of eminent men, known for their sober judgment, issued a press statement affirming "the absolutely constitutional character of the Home Rule propaganda." The signatories included a retired High Court judge of Madras, Sir. S. Subramania Iyer, some members of the Madras Legislative Council and some newspaper editors.



In order to expose how England's professions—of liberty and democracy—differed from her practical action, she sent emissaries to and contacted public-spirited men in several democratic countries—Australia, United States and Britain itself—and there was an echo of the Indian agitation in those countries.

More and more eminent men were coming under the banner of the Home Rule League—B.C. Pal, C.Y. Chintamani, C.R. Das, D.N. Bahadurji, Bhulabhai Desai, M.R. Jayakar, K.M. Munshi, P.K. Telang, Horniman. To give further fillip to the movement, a Besant Home Rule Fund was started, and contributions flowed in from different parts of the country. Some clerks resorted to a fortnightly fast demonstrably to save for the fund.

The general official attitude of intolerance, even of the legally tolerable political activity, was becoming a greater asset to the movement than the leaders' exhortations. Along with the internment order and demand for a higher amount of security, the Madras Government had also issued another order prohibiting Mrs. Besant and other interneers from attending or taking part in any meeting, from making any speech, from publishing any speech composed by them, and placing their correspondence under censorship. Mrs. Besant talked of Home Rule within the limits of the law ; but now, in some parts of the country, political bodies began suggesting that a passive resistance movement should be resorted to. The most enthusiastic for it were the provincial Congress Committees of Bihar and Madras. The Bihar committee gave a sort of ultimatum saying if the interneers were not allowed freedom to function by the date it fixed, the committee would give a call for passive resistance. In Madras, the retired High Court Judge, Sir Subrahmania Iyer, renounced his Knighthood title in protest.

Theodore Besterman, a biographer of Mrs. Besant, has quoted her own words to describe the situation : "When we, the interneers, foregathered at Octacamund, a whirlwind broke out, raged up and down the country, stormed over to Britain, Russia, France, America at several hundred miles an hour. Questions were asked in the House of Commons and the Viceroy's Legislative Council. 'Who would have thought,' said a very high official pensively, 'that there would have been such a fuss over an old woman ?' Crowds of people and many popular leaders joined the Home Rule League. Meetings were held, resolutions flew about, Congressmen everywhere fanned the storm and rode it. For three months violent agitation continued unbrokenly."

The talk of passive resistance was growing in volume. A joint meeting of the All-India Congress Committee and the Council of the Muslim League was convened, and it decided to ask for the opinion of the Provincial Congress Committees and the League units within six weeks. In the meantime the Bengal Government prohibited the public meeting

announced to be held under the presidentship of Rash Behari Ghosh to protest against the internment. The Congress-League joint committee demanded : (1) an authoritative pronouncement pledging the Imperial Government in unequivocal terms to the policy of making India a self-governing member of the British Empire ; (2) immediate steps to sanction the scheme of reforms conjointly framed by the organization, and (3) the reversal of the repressive policy.

The repression, however, continued ; and as if to deride at the Congress-League demand, the Government of India sent round a circular to the provincial governments calling upon them to deal suitably with the Home Rule agitation. Consequently, in several provinces further threats were held out, and the magistrate behaved as despotic rulers.

The climax of the repressive policy, as being rewarding to the movement and particularly to Mrs. Besant, came from the leading Congressmen's decision to nominate her for the presidentship of the 1917 Congress.

### **Campaign Intensified—The Last Phase**

The year 1917 was a year of great hope for India, though the hope was badly damaged towards the close by the so-called Rowlatt Committee. The occasion for the hope was, as already indicated, the Secretary of State's August (1917) announcement promising "progressive realization" of self-rule.

The two Home Rule Leagues—of Tilak and Annie Besant—were functioning side by side. Mrs. Besant suggested a merger, but Tilak, for his own solid reasons insisted on keeping up his League as a separate entity. However, an agreement as to the sphere of each was arrived at. Tilak's League was to work in the Central provinces, Bombay Presidency and Bombay city, and Besant's in the rest of the country. The changed attitude of the Congress and the Muslim League and the triumph of Tilak and his extremist group at the 1916 Congress were serious developments to the Government. But the hope of undoing them lingered on. The Home Member of the Government of India wrote to the Viceroy: "For good or for evil Tilak and Mrs. Besant have had a triumph over the Moderates, and we can only hope that this triumph will prove to be short-lived and ultimately disastrous to their leadership. The purity of the intentions of Mrs. Besant and Tilak has been certified by two High Courts, though everybody knows that the former influenced by the passionate desire of a vain old lady to be a leader of movements, and (knows too) the venom and hatred of the latter against everything British. These two may cover their language under the cloak of loyalty to the Crown and the affected desire that India shall continue within the Empire, but if you read the speeches and articles, it is impossible to discover why a continuance of the British connection is desired at all,

or what India has to gain from it, if all the rest of the assertions made are true."

Other high-placed officials wrote to the Viceroy in similar strain and suggested that some deterrent action was needed. The Viceroy held a different opinion, and in his reply said that he would be prepared to consent to "summary action being taken against Tilak, Mrs. Besant and such like, if a clear case is made. But as things stand, it seems to me impossible on paper to draw a distinction between the self-government which we advocate as the ultimate goal of British rule in India and Home Rule as advocated by Tilak and Mrs. Besant, though we know in fact that the two policies are as poles apart." (1 February 1917).

Just a few days later the Punjab Government displayed a different posture. When that Government came to know that Tilak was planning to make a tour of the Punjab, it issued an order banning his entry. The Punjab Governor, Sir Michael o'Dwyer, had become known for his harsh rule. And then, he had to deal with the rebels, who had returned from America and other foreign countries with revolutionary ideas. He expressed his views thus: "As the Ghadar movement, with some phases of which we are still dealing, shows how ignorant or half-educated Punjabis practically interpret the Home Rule propaganda, it is considered that in present conditions of the Punjab the visit of Tilak to this province in support of the propaganda would be fraught with considerable danger to the public tranquility."

In March 1917, the Bombay Government again made a complaint to Delhi, saying: "The effect of the judgment of the High Court has been most unfortunate. The violence of the speeches and writings in connection with Home Rule and kindred movements has increased in volume. The Government of Bombay have been watching the developments of this movement with growing anxiety. The Governor-in-Council regards Tilak as a man whose political activities are fraught with public danger, and while their last attempt to cure him ended in failure, they feel that the time has now come for some further measure to be taken in that direction. Again, however, they hesitate to act because of the official recognition given to him by the presence of His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor of the United provinces on the same platform at Lucknow last Christmas." (The reference was to the Congress session of 1916 which the Lt. Governor had attended).

The letter then proposed that "all agitation aiming at Home Rule must be regarded as seditious because it is calculated to stir up disaffection not only against the Government as at present constituted, but against any form of government that was likely to be established within any reasonable time that can be foreseen. The absence of such a declaration makes it difficult for the Government of Bombay to take effective action against persons, Indian or European, who are fanning the flame, and leads to

to desultory and inconsistent action in the different provinces.”

Eventually, the Government of India yielded, and issued (March 1917) a circular to provincial governments outlining the policy to be pursued with regard to the Home Rule agitation. In cases where law had been transgressed, prosecutions were to be launched without any hesitation. Students were prohibited from attending meetings where Home Rule was likely to be discussed. The circular further said: “It is scarcely necessary to state that neither the reforms recommended by the Government of India, nor any reforms which His Majesty’s Government are likely to approve can bear resemblance to the extravagant demands for the grant of early Home Rule to India, which the agitators present to their deluded assurances. It is evident, therefore, that the wilder the hopes that are excited by the Home Rule organizations, the greater will be the disappointment and the more violent the protests when the actual reforms that may be approved by His Majesty’s Government come in due course to be promulgated.”

The latter, therefore, asked for a counter-propaganda to be started by the provincial governments “to check the extravagant expectations which have been engendered by Home Rule agitators.” The latter required that “experienced officers” in the provinces should “point out to all Indians’ who are likely to listen to reason that any thought of early Home Rule should be put entirely out of mind. They should warn all men of light and learning and all those who have hereditary influence over the people at large to dissociate themselves from the Home Rule campaign as it is at present being conducted.”

Some of the provincial governments were already far ahead of the central government in their zeal, the most overactive being the Bombay government. There, Lord Willingdon (later Viceroy of India) had ‘earned the fame’ as a very rigid and harsh ruler. He proposed a conference of representatives from the provinces; and in his overzeal directly issued invitations to the provinces. This was obviously an encroachment on the centre’s authority, and was naturally resented. Disagreeing with him the Government of India told him that “the disadvantages of such a conference on the whole outweigh the advantages.

Willingdon’s overacting was not damped, and he suggested to the centre that it should be a common policy of all provincial governments to prohibit organizers of any meeting from including in their agenda of business the subject of Home Rule. The Government of India again discouraged him, saying that “such a general prohibition could not legitimately be issued”, because by this course “the difficulties of the provincial governments would only be increased”.

The Viceroy visualised the situation in a different perspective. Tilak, Annie Besant and others were arousing the hope that Home Rule was now not far away, and the official remedy against the expectation, the

Viceroy thought, was to nip it by an official announcement from London. He wrote to the Secretary of State for India: "Mrs. Besant, Tilak and others are fomenting with great vigour the agitation for immediate Home Rule, and in the absence of any definite announcement by the Government of India as to their policy in the matter, it is attracting many of those who hitherto have held less advanced views. The agitation is having a mischievous effect on public feeling throughout the country. Consistent and malicious attacks on the system and method of present administration are aggravating the danger." The Viceroy had reports in his possession to say what he had reported to the Secretary of State. Home Rule workers were moving in villages and asking the villagers to sign the roll of the League. The workers told them that they should feel fearless as British rule would soon end and Home Rule would be established.

The District Magistrate of Satara, to give an instance, had reported to the government that Home Rule men were advising the villagers not to subscribe to the war loan because the government was deceiving them; they had better give the money to Tilak, who was going to England to arouse public opinion there for Indian Home Rule.

Not less active than Home Rule campaigners were official intelligence sleuths. Many of them had a tendency, to prove their extra loyalty, to present an exaggerated picture of the 'danger'. In substance their reports, however, contained what was happening on the Home Rule front. To quote from the report : "The only people who have a well-conceived plan of passive resistance are the friends and followers of Tilak, who are of opinion that Indians should refuse to cooperate with Government in various spheres of life and public activity, viz., educational, industrial, moral, commercial, political and administrative."

Another report was interesting for a different reason. Dr. Moonje, the leader of the extremists in the Central Provinces, told the Director of Criminal Intelligence, who had sought an interview with him : "Mrs. Besant had done her best for Home Rule, but, as a matter of fact, she had been used throughout as a tool by the real Home Rule statesman, who was Tilak. Mrs. Besant was really a mere agent of Tilak, though she did not know it herself."

It was the Home Rule agitation, which rather compelled His Majesty's Government to come out with a positive policy statement. The Secretary of State for India, Montagu, made a formal announcement in Parliament (22 August 1917), saying that "the policy of His Majesty's Government is that of the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration and the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire."

The announcement was considered vague ; it did not set a time-limit by which responsible government would be conceded. The Home Rulers,

therefore did not slacken their activities. And the vigorous intelligence—reporting to Tilak—continued unabated. One of the reports lamented : “The capture of the Congress organization by Mrs. Besant and Tilak is complete. The moderate party in the Congress is extinguished. The Congress is completely identified with Home Rule.”

Dissatisfaction against the Montagu announcement was now to be utilised as an additional point in the armoury of attacks. In October another joint meeting of the All-India Congress Committee and the Council of the Muslim League was held at Allahabad. The meeting decided to send a deputation to the Viceroy and the Secretary of State—Montagu had since arrived in India—to press for the acceptance of the Congress-League scheme of self-government. The deputation did its job, but the top dignitaries of the realm gave no assurance.

An interesting episode, associated with the Delhi visit of the deputation, deserves to be mentioned. The deputation consisted of Tilak, Gandhi, Jinnah, Tej Bahadur Saprú and Motilal Nehru. Of these all Tilak alone had an impediment in his way. Like the Punjab Government, the Chief Commissioner of Delhi had also prohibited his entry into Delhi. He cancelled the order. But that of the Punjab Government remained. The map was consulted and it was discovered that by whatever route Tilak approached Delhi, he would have to traverse a portion of the Punjab. On the intervention of the Government of India, the Punjab Government accorded the sanction on the condition that, while passing through the Punjab territory, Tilak would not address any meeting.

Tilak knew the psychology of the people, and would even invoke scriptures to augment the spirit of the campaign : “Swaraj is the natural consequence of diligent performance of duty. The *Karma-yogi* strives for Swaraj, and the *Gyanin* or spiritualist yearns for it. God does not help the indolent. You must be up and doing. Action also must be our guiding principle, action disinterested and well-thought-out. It is your birthright to govern your own house; nobody else can claim to do it.”

The time was now approaching for the annual session of the Congress. Annie Besant had been proposed for the Presidentship of the 1916 Congress also, but the show was yet in the hands of the Moderates, and at the election she was defeated. In 1917, the country was resounding with the vibrations of Home Rule noise everywhere, and an overwhelming majority of Congress delegates had arrayed themselves behind Tilak. And Mrs. Besant was elected with a thundering applause. The Congress was now committed to Home Rule of the kind propounded by Tilak. (word had earlier been circulated among the delegates that Mrs. Besant was Tilak's nominee.)

In her presidential address, Annie Besant emphasised the point, which Tilak had raised at the previous year's Lucknow Congress and which the Moderates were not willing to concede, that a Bill should be brought before

parliament during 1918, "establishing self-government in India on lines resembling those of the Commonwealth on a date to be laid down therein, preferably 1923, the latest 1928, the intermediate five or ten years being occupied with transference of the government from British to Indian hands, maintaining the British tie as in the dominions."

The main resolution of the Congress also urged "the necessity for the immediate enactment of a parliamentary statute providing for the establishment of responsible government in India, the full measure to be attained within a time limit to be fixed in the statute itself at an early date."

The Muslim League President, Jinnah, was moving ahead side by side with the progress of the Home Rule idea. On behalf of his party, he said at a meeting of the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee (1917): "To those who know India and understand India, it is clear that she no longer will merely obey, but wants to manage her own affairs. 'Peace, prosperity and security', which satisfied a decade ago, are no longer enough. If you deprive a nation of all shares in its own government in the forging of its destiny, you emasculate its energies, undermine its character." He appealed to the Hindus and Muslims to stand "united and use every constitutional and legitimate means to effect the transfer of power as soon as possible."

Just for a little diversion, a word may be said about an officially-inspired element, which eventually turned out to be a ridiculous humour. The Secretary of State Montagu (now in India, as already stated) and Viceroy Chelmsford were holding discussions with different complexions of political opinion in the country. Some Muslims, calling themselves 'Ulema', also called on Montagu and Chelmsford. The latter asked them: "Can you tell your views shortly to the Secretary of State and myself?" Quick came the answer: "We do not want Home Rule." The further conversation is recorded thus in Montagu's diary: "Then a delightful old man, with a beautiful beard and a fine profile, told us that he had studied the *Koran* and all the commentaries, the Bible and the holy books, and he could find no sanction for the Congress-League scheme in them."

From the very beginning of his political career, Tilak had been conscious of vested interests and officials using religion against the mounting Home Rule spirit. To him the feasible remedy was to summon religion also in the course of the furtherance of his programme. In January 1918, he called a private conference of some religious men—both Hindu and Muslim. He spoke to them on the desirability of intensifying the Home Rule agitation, and said that it could not be made a full success unless religion also come to its aid. The outcome of the conference was that two new movements came up. One was the revival of *Kirtan* among the Hindus and the other was the *Anjuman-i-Khuddam-e-Kaabah*. At the

meeting of these two, political songs were to be sung with religious fervour.

Because of Tilak's generosity in dealing with an adversary, the government were having a smooth-sailing in the recruitment of Indian soldiers for the war. Hoping against hope and believing that the British would sincerely promise Home Rule at the earliest possible date, he did not give a call against the recruitment drive. Three years of the war had already run out, and during the first two years he had at times spoken in favour of the war effort. "If age and grey hair", he once said, "are no disqualifications, I am prepared to stand in the fighting line." Now he was bitterly disillusioned. He made speeches advising people that he could not honestly ask them to join the army.

Therefore, the War Conference, held on 27 April 1918, on the invitation of the Viceroy, Tilak, Besant and other leaders of the Home Rule movement were not invited. Montagu did not agree with the Viceroy's short-sighted policy. A note in his Diary may be quoted: "With regard to Tilak, if I were the Viceroy, I would have had him at Delhi at all costs. He is at the moment probably the most powerful man in India, and he has it in his power, if he chooses, to help materially in the war effort."

As a challenge to the Viceroy ignoring the real representatives of public opinion, a public meeting was held in Delhi to coincide with the War Conference. Convened under the auspices of the Home Rule League, the Provincial Congress Committee, the Muslim League and the Indian Association, the meeting adopted a resolution reiterating Home Rule and saying that a conference like the one called by the Viceroy could not be regarded as representative unless persons like Tilak, Besant, and Rabindranath Tagore were invited to it.

Nevertheless, a feeble voice was raised at the War Conference. Khaparde, one of the thirty 'representatives of the people,' invited to the Conference, drafted a resolution for Home Rule. Only 14 of the 30 signed it, and when Khaparde stood up to move it all other signatories backed out.

And amusingly enough when Tilak was invited to another similar meeting, the result was more bitterness and more fire added to the cause he represented. The invitation was extended by Governor Willingdon, and the occasion was the Bombay Presidency War Conference. The fun of it was the Governor's expectation for cooperation without a word of reference to Home Rule. Naturally, when a resolution for cooperation was moved, Tilak stood up to move an amendment incorporating his point. As Tilak began to speak, Willingdon, after interrupting him twice, ruled out any political discussion at the conference. And Tilak left the platform and walked out of the meeting.

Twelve days later (22 June 1918), the voice suppressed there, got a



full-throated expression at a public meeting. Tilak told the audience: "The British just want you to supply soldiers whom they want for the war. Do not entertain any ambition in your minds. Why should we come forward to protect that India in which we have no rights, in which we are treated like slaves ?.....The bureaucracy has overrun the whole nation; and we are not prepared to become soldiers in order to increase the power of these men. What are we to tell our men ? Join the army to strengthen the *zulum* of these English people."

Whether the cooperation with government should be qualified or unqualified was an honest point of difference, born of convictions. Unlike Tilak, Annie Besant was for the latter, and she had on her side Gandhi, who had already emerged as a great leader. At a meeting of the All-India Congress Committee, held at Bombay sometime before the Delhi War Conference, she had got a resolution passed calling on all patriotic organizations to aid in the recruitment of Indians for Home and Imperial defence. Annie Besant was not so vocal about the recruitment earlier, and what was regarded as a change in her attitude provoked an open revolt against her. The climax came a month later when, at the Madras Provincial Conference (9 May 1918), she made a speech, full of persuasive eloquence, in support of recruitment. The proceedings were constantly interrupted by the younger members of the extremist school. They were now in open revolt.

In June the attitude of revolt further stiffened when Tilak's speech (quoted above) was made by the Bombay Governor an excuse to issue an order under the Defence of India Rules, forbidding him to speak in public without a written permission of the District Magistrate of the place where he intended to speak. The All-India Home Rule League, of which Annie Besant was the founder, gradually went out of her control; and she put up a separate organization. She named it the National Home Rule League.

As the War was drawing to a close, the realization that claimed greater attention was that propaganda should be intensified in England. A fund for the Home Rule deputation, to be sent to England, was announced to be raised. Tilak used the opportunity to tour the country. In three weeks, he covered a distance of a thousand miles, addressed public meetings at thirty places, and as, after haranguing on Home Rule, he appealed for subscriptions, the people vied with each other in rushing to the rostrum to deliver their currency notes and coins. He said: "I should like to have sixty-four pice from as many persons instead of one rupee from one." (Sixty-four pice amounted to a rupee then.)

What to do about Tilak in one situation or another had been a jigsaw puzzle with the government. The same attitude of mind was displayed over the proposed Home Rule delegation to be sent to England. In fact, the puzzle had started a few months earlier (in March 1918), when

Tilak had made his intention to visit England known. To allow or not to allow him was the problem; and different viewpoints were exchanged between the authorities in Delhi and London. Eventually, the Viceroy wrote to the Secretary of State that in the tense situation, Tilak was "more dangerous" in India than he would be in England.

Towards the end of March passports were issued for Tilak and other members of the delegation; but the confusion in official mind continued. On 2 April, the delegation reached Colombo. The next day, the Secretary of State, going back on his consent, wired to the Viceroy that on the motion of the General Staff, the War Cabinet has decided that the passports of the delegation should be cancelled. The telegram said: "The present time requires that whole energies of the civil population should be concentrated on work essential to the prosecution of the war and not distracted by violent inflammatory propaganda. It would be necessary to have the closest continuous supervision over the delegates, and experience here and in Ireland has shown that the task cannot be discharged successfully by a police reduced to half its strength.' And the delegates had to return to India from Colombo.

The refusal imparted fresh vigour to the movement. A campaign for reconsideration of the War Cabinet's decision went on for several months, the most vocal among the protesters being Jinnah. In his telegram to the Viceroy, Jinnah said: "In view of the vigorous campaign led by Lord Sydenham and other influential persons against self-government for India now being carried on England they—the *Bombay Branch of the Home Rule League of which Jinnah was the President*—feel the emergent necessity that the representatives of the Indian national movement should be able to place their case directly before the electorate of the United Kingdom in whose hands the ultimate decision regarding the scheme of reforms now under consideration lies. I am, therefore, to urge once more upon the serious consideration of His Majesty's Government the desirability of rescinding their orders."

The authorities were sandwiched between the rising tempo of the movement in India and the likelihood of heat to be generated in England. Again and again the latter was as less dangerous by the Government of India. By the middle of September the opinion in London also moved in favour of Delhi's contention. At long last, Tilak left for England on 24 September 1918. Those who accompanied him were R.P. Karandikar, Yasudev Rao Joshi, and G.M. Namjoshi.

What the delegation did in England can best be summed up from a letter Tilak wrote to Lajpat Rai: "We arrived here at the end of October and began our work in the first week of November. Then came on the elections, and the whole country was engaged in and busy with the electioneering campaign. We thought that the Labour Party would return at least a hundred members, but as you know it has only returned 63.

All the leading Pacifists are defeated, including Ramsay MacDonald". This was a great damper to the delegation; among those pleading India's cause the most active was Ramsay. During the electioneering, the delegation (to quote Tilak) "distributed ten lakhs of leaflets all over Great Britain and Ireland. The London branch of the Madras Home Rule League also circulated a memorandum to the candidates."

The letter further said: "Though the British Committee of the Congress would not do anything, it was not advisable to wait till it was roused into work. We, therefore, published a pamphlet on *Self-Determination for India*, with two cartoons, and we have sent copies thereof to the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State, Sir S.P. Sinha, Maharaja of Bikaner, and to all members of the House of Commons and the House of Lords, and others. We mean to have it circulated very largely and to follow it up by another pamphlet explaining and criticising the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme".

Among the numerous speeches Tilak made, one was at a meeting of the Britain and India Society on 3 May 1919. He was introduced to the audience by Colonel Wedgwood as "the most popular leader in India, one who in those days of democracy is fighting for the liberty of his country", just as Wedgwood himself and his associates were doing in England. Tilak commenced his discourse with a long historical review of India, going back to the period before Christ. Then he came to the "mighty" force of East India Company, the "inhuman practices" of which had become a byword in India. He narrated how the Company exploited the country and tortured, robbed and murdered native artisans, at that time the finest skilled workmen in the world. One of the extreme tortures, he said, was the cutting off of the thumbs of the cotton spinners; this was done to disable them from competing with English exports.

He would tell his British audiences: "When you acknowledge the intellectual powers of India, their advance in science, literature and fine arts, how do you refuse them the right of self-Government and how do you doubt their capacity to manage the affairs of the land of their birth".

Tilak's stay in England, lasting a year, caused no small amount of strain to the intelligence department of the British Government. The Government of India had also deputed its own staff, which sent weekly reports on Tilak and his colleagues. Already Tilak had succeeded in making a number of labour leader champions of the Indian cause. So much frightened were the vested interests in England that when he placed an order with a firm (Peters Limited and Vickers) for a semi-diesel engine, he required to drive his printing machine in Poona, the firm made a reference to the Secretary of State for India, asking: "Do you know this gentleman; is he the notorious Indian agitator?" The reply said:

“Mr. B.G. Tilak, whose particulars are given in your letter, is the well-known Indian politician whose libel suit was recently before the High Court in this country.” (The reference was to Tilak’s suit against Valentine Chirol, who, in his *Indian Unrest*, had made defamatory comments.)

As indicated earlier, the other foreign country, chosen for an intensive campaign, was the USA. There too, as in England, the propaganda went on for about a year. The deputation sent there consisted of Lajpat Rai, N.S. Hardikar, and K.D. Shastri. The most active of them was Hardikar. In a report he sent to Tilak on 20 May 1919, he said: In a period of “86 days I travelled through 20 states. I gave 83 popular addresses and arranged 25 conferences. I sold 4,000 copies of *Self-Determination for India* and 1,500 copise of *Get Together in India*. In all the cities I was received by chief newspaper proprietors.” And Lajpat Rai, in his report, said: “Dr. Hardikar has returned from his tour which was very successful from every point of view. He brought new members, established new branches, and secured also some funds. We have been issuing occasional bulletins to the United States press giving them a summary of what we put in the English press.” Lajpat Rai also sent to Tilak a leaflet by Norman Thomas entitled ‘Rebellion in India’. Thomas was one of the speakers at an Irish revolutionary meeting held in New York (8 May), at which India was also discussed. At usual, the Government of India sleuths were active in the USA also, and as usual notes were being exchanged between high authorities, expressing their anxiety on the Home Rule propaganda in the USA.

Returning to India (November 1919), Tilak lived hardly eight months: he expired on 1 August 1920. A new chapter in Indian politics had already begun. The occasion was provided by the so-called Rowlatt Committee, appointed by the Government of India in December 1919, “to investigate and report on the nature of and criminal conspiracies connected with the revolutionary movement in India.” The Committee’s report was followed by the Government’s publication of the two Bills, known as the Rowlatt Bills, drastically curtailing liberty of the Indian people. It was the saddest ‘reward’ for the Indian cooperation in the war effort. And then sprang up, under the leadership of Gandhi, a mighty mass movement. This, however, is a different phase of India’s struggle for freedom.

Annie Besant, let it be noted, was not a spent force. Her different convictions may have isolated her, as indeed they did, but she continued with her National Home Rule League when Tilak’s campaign reigned supreme. Her place in the Home Rule Movement remains untarnished, nay honourable.

## SWARAJYA PARTY

The Swarajya Party owed its origin to the peculiar political circumstances which arose in the Indian national movement in the early twenties of this century. It was led by the national leaders, whose spirit of nationalism or self-sacrifice was never in doubt. As a matter of fact, those who were inspired to form this party were leaders of great eminence and integrity. They had been a part of the Indian National Congress and had played a tremendous role in building it into a powerful opposition against the British imperialism. The two leaders who had set it up—C.R. Das and Motilal Nehru—were President and General Secretary respectively of the Indian National Congress. C.R. Das was a great lawyer, a great organiser and an equally great patriot, who had sacrificed his fabulous practice and fortune in the service of the motherland. The same was true of Motilal Nehru. These selfless workers in the cause of the nation had not set apart to weaken the parent organisation, They, on the other hand, wanted to strengthen it and its political programme in a material way. The differences were merely of a strategic character and not of the goal, which remained the same for all sections of Congressmen.

The Swarajya Party thus did not consist of persons who had broken away from the Congress on principle or personal differences. Indian history has instances where out of personal pique or vendetta or lure of office, people have left or betrayed the national cause to further their own interests. There have been instances of the so-called parties being formed on regional or communal lines or at the instance of imperial bureaucracy to discredit or dissipate energies of the national movement. The Swarajya party was formed by the proven nationalists to strengthen the programme of Congress towards the attainment of its objective—*Swaraj* or independence.

Party, according to the Oxford Dictionary, means 'body of persons united in a cause, opinion etc., attachment to such body, taking of sides on public questions.' The Swarajya party had all these attributes and had, therefore, been rightly called a party. But it was a party within the

national movement and outside it. It started as a minority party within the Congress with the aim to convert that minority into a majority persuading people to its interpretation of the working by programme of the Congress in the light of prevailing political conditions at that time.

## **II**

The Indian National Congress from its inception till the advent of the First World War was a Congress of resolutions and petitions in the court of British power. Its objective was defined in its 1899 session as "the promotion by constitutional means the interest and well-being of the people of the Indian Empire." It was a step-by-step approach to self-rule.

In 1906, Dadabhai Naoroji, as President of the Congress, gave the slogan 'Swaraj'. He said, "the whole matter can be comprised in one word Swaraj or 'Self-Government' like that of the United Kingdom or colonies". The resolution on it demanded:

1. Simultaneous examinations in India and England;
2. Adequate representation in the Indian Council and Executive Councils of Viceroy and Governors of Bombay and Madras;
3. Expansion of Councils;
4. Extension of power of local and municipal bodies. It was a slow movement towards Swaraj.

The moderates were, however, in the control of the Congress and when Lokmanya Tilak appeared on political horizon, he and his followers were dubbed by them as extremists. There were real differences of approach towards the goal of Swaraj between them and the moderates and split came in the Surat Session of 1907. Out of 1,600 delegates to the session, 700 abstained from the National Convention called by the moderates after the split. The objective of the Congress was defined by these moderates as "the attainment by India of self-Government similar to that enjoyed by self-government members of the British Commonwealth through strictly constitutional means". All the delegates of the Congress had now to subscribe to this creed and take a written pledge. The Congress at Madras in 1908 and at Lahore in 1909 welcomed the Minto-Morley Reforms though it criticized the creation of separate electorates on the basis of religion. The moderates who by now were in full control were constitutional conservatives. Lokmanya Tilak refused to join the Congress after his release from Mandalay jail unless the objective of the Congress accepted by it after the Surat split was modified. The Congress session in Bombay accepted the amendment and the object was stated as "the attainment of self-government within the British Empire by constitutional means". Lokmanya Tilak joined the Congress and gave the call for Home Rule for India. Mrs. Annie Besant started her Home Rule League in 1916, which also advocated Home Rule for India. She was elected

President of the Calcutta Session of the Congress in 1917. The resolution on the self-government stated, "This Congress strongly urges the necessity for the immediate enactment of a parliamentary statute providing for the establishment of responsible Government in India, the full measure to be obtained within a time limit to be fixed in the statute itself at an early date". It was in this year that Mahatma Gandhi tried *Satyagraha* and Passive Disobedience in Champaran district of Bihar. In 1918, he tried *Satyagraha* in Gujarat. He fashioned them as powerful instruments in his struggle against injustices perpetrated by the Indian vested interests as well as the British power.

The Montagu-Chelmsford report created differences of opinion amongst the nationalist leaders though they all considered it, on the whole, as retrograde. Their stand was made clear at the Bombay Session in 1918. It declared that Congress would not be satisfied with anything less than self-government as Indians were fit for responsible government. It also demanded constitutional advance both at the centre and the provinces. It asked for a Declaration of Rights: Liberty of person; property; association; freedom of speech; freedom of press; equality before law; complete authority over matters concerning peace and tranquility as well as defence of the country.

Political climate underwent a change in the country in the wake of the First World War. India's successful participation in the First World War, which was fought to make the world safe for democracy and Wilson's Fourteen Points, which included the principle of self-determination, had created new hopes and aspirations among the people. The Delhi session of 1918, in one of its Resolutions, asked for the application of the principle of self-determination to India. It also demanded full provincial autonomy instead of partial responsibility promised in the Montagu-Chelmsford Act. There was, however, no unanimity on this demand. The cleavage between the moderates and extremists again surfaced. The moderates were satisfied with a partial responsibility given to the elected Indians by these Reforms. The extremists, however, wanted full provincial autonomy and showed grave dissatisfaction with the Act on this account. The moderates were content with what had been offered and were keen to work the reforms. The extremists considered them a sham and rejected the proposed partial autonomy, which they felt fell far short of the Montagu Declaration of 1917.

The Congress was at the crossroads. It had to take a definite stand on the issue of *Swaraj*. The question no longer could be reduced to mere that of tactics. It was the whole approach to the accepted goal that was at stake. 1919 was not 1907 when patriots like Lokmanya Tilak could be thrown out of the Congress by the moderates because they were dubbed as extremists. Political conditions had materially changed since then. The World War I had enabled ordinary Indians to visit western

countries as soldiers and to see for themselves political freedom that they enjoyed. Till then they had thought of the British as some special beings endowed with special gifts to rule over the rest of mankind. They had accepted the Raj as divinely ordained. When they fought with white soldiers in the trenches in France, Italy or elsewhere, they discovered that they were also ordinary human beings like themselves. Living in those countries opened their eyes to the real situation and they felt that they were their equals in all respects. When they returned home after the war, they could no longer feel the same in the presence of the white soldiers or administrators. They considered themselves as much responsible for the victory over Germany, as British or dominion soldiers were. The white supremacy had received a jolt from which it could never fully recover. These soldiers drawn from ordinary homes recounted their experiences abroad to their families and friends in the innumerable villages scattered all over the country. The bubble of imperialism had been pricked.

The political effects of the war were still more dramatic. Wilson with his Fourteen Points had opened Pandora's box for imperialism. Indian Congress was till then dominated by those who were either educated in the United Kingdom or who were so successful at the bar or business that they could visit U.K. and other countries. They also had contacts with the ruling bureaucracy at various levels. They emulated their culture and were influenced by their social life but resented being treated as unequal by them. They had found in British literature and political institutions the acme of human wisdom. Persons nurtured on Shakespeare and Lock, who had seen the freedom of debate in the House of Commons could not think of any other alternative system of politics and government for themselves. The moderates overwhelmingly belonged to this strata of society.

British aristocracy and Indian aristocracy as represented by the moderates not only believed in gradualism, which suited their vested interests but considered it as the right course for Indian constitutional development. Self-determination of Wilson, however, had thrown a spanner in their political works. There was an upsurge in the Indian national sentiment, which represented a new urge, a new expression and added a new dimensions to the political demands of the Congress. The new leadership which challenged the entire political status quo had emerged out of these new stirrings amongst the people and the leader who could fulfil these hopes was found in the person of M.K. Gandhi, a Bar-at-Law, recently returned from South Africa.

M.K. Gandhi was, indeed, a phenomenon in Indian politics. He represented the eternal values of the East with a fine blend of all that was good in the West. He combined the wisdom of Buddha with the self-sacrifice of Christ. He mixed Tolstoy with Rousseau and disarmed Marx



to put him in the rustic peasants' clothing. He spoke from heart, which had an echo in every human breast. Here was a revolution, who preached suffering and practiced novel weapons of truth and non-violence touching the human heart, not to destroy it but to convert it. The moderates in 1919 had to contend with this new force in Indian politics. With Gandhi, a new era had opened not only in Indian politics but also in human history.

### III

World War I had thus brought a great change in the aspirations of Indians towards self-government. The moderates were more of traditionalist and believed in slow pace towards the Swaraj. For them, dyarchy proposed by Lionel Curtis and adopted in Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms was a step in the right direction and which should be wholeheartedly accepted. Surendra Nath Banerjea was the chief spokesman of this view and as we have seen the Moderates had also dominated the Congress views. Bal Gangadhar Tilak and C.R. Das opposed them and held that Swaraj could not be built on half-way houses and that dyarchy was totally unacceptable to them. Even Annie Besant, who later sided with the Moderates, wrote in *New India* ; "The scheme is unworthy to be offered by England or to be accepted by India." "The Montagu scheme", observed Tilak, "is entirely unacceptable": C.R. Das had told Montagu when he was on tour to India in 1917: "The reforms suggested by Mr. Curtis cannot succeed. Provincial autonomy is essential". Montagu recorded in his Diary that in private conversation Das was emphatic that "there is no intermediate stage possible between responsible Government and complete responsibility".

The Moderates in the changed environment found themselves in a minority amongst the nationalist India. The decision on the Reforms was to be taken in the special session of the Indian National Congress at Bombay in 1918. They decided to opt out of the Congress. Surendra Nath Banerjea wrote : "In the midst of all this excitement and ferment, a special session of the Congress was called to consider the Report and we, who did not profess the same extreme views, had to decide what we should do. Should we attend the Congress or not ? We decided to abstain. We felt that these hasty and extreme views would dominate the deliberations of the Congress and that we should not lend them the weight of our support by our presence." He was certain that the Moderates had thereby done a great service to the country in its constitutional advance towards self-government. He noted: "Our decision to abstain from the Congress was, as events have shown, a wise one, and I claim that we of the Moderate party saved the scheme." A dubious distinction nevertheless. It was indeed ironic for him to say, "Separation from the

Congress was a heavy price to pay, but it had to be paid if the prospects of the speedy inauguration of the beginnings of responsible government to be realized”.

The imperial governing bureaucracy became nervous as nationalist opinion spread in the country. 1919 was a critical year in the history of freedom movement. The Rowlatt Act, an extremely harsh measure to suppress political movement, was passed in March 1919. Mahatma Gandhi led the agitation against it and asked his countrymen to observe *Satyagraha* on 6 April. It was the beginning of the civil resistance movement on a national scale. The Act was followed by Jallianwala Bagh massacre. It sent a wave of horror throughout the country and embittered the feelings of ordinary people against the British rule. A new political awakening had come with a sudden rude jerk in the whole country.

The Indian Reforms Act was passed by the British Parliament on 24 December 1919. The Congress met at Amritsar within a few days of the passing of this Act. Motilal Nehru presided over the session. It was attended by all the leaders of the Party. Tilak, Gandhi, Das, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Ali Brothers, Dr. Kitchlew and Lala Harkishan Lal. Motilal Nehru appealed to the Moderates to join them as “the lacerated heart of the Punjab called them”. There was no response as the Moderates had set their hearts on working the Reforms.

C.R. Das moved the resolution that British Parliament should take early steps to give responsible government to the country in accordance with the principle of self-determination. He termed the Reforms “inadequate, unsatisfactory and disappointing”. Mahatma Gandhi did not agree with it and moved the amendment that people should cooperate with the Reforms to secure early responsible government. Das opposed it, while Malaviya and Jinnah lent their support to Mahatma Gandhi. After protracted discussion, a clause was added to the resolution, “Pending establishment of full responsible government, the Congress trusts that so far as may be possible the people will so work the Reforms as to secure an early establishment of full responsible government.”

At this stage, Mahatma Gandhi was in favour of working dyarchy, while C.R. Das was opposed to it. The condition soon changed and so did the attitude of the top leaders of the movement. The Jallianwala tragedy was an eye opener to all those who had still faith in the British people if not in the British Government of India. The Congress wanted a Royal Commission to enquire into it but the government would not go beyond an Enquiry Committee with Lord Hunter as the Chairman and only two Indians as its members. The Punjab government did not allow C.R. Das to cross-examine the witnesses and neither did it allow eminent Punjabis, who witnessed the tragedy to give evidence before it. However, it allowed Sir Michael O'Dwyer, General Dyer and Col. Johnson

to give their evidence. Representations to this effect were sent to the Viceroy and the Secretary of State for India. They were also turned down. The AICC then set up its own Enquiry Committee with Mahatma Gandhi as the Chairman and Motilal Nehru, Das, Dr. Jayakar and Tyabji as members. It concluded that brutal outrages had been committed and demanded the resignation of Lord Chelmsford, recall of O' Dwyer, and punishment of military officers concerned including General Dyer. The Indian members of the Hunter Committee also came to similar conclusion though the white members played 'down the atrocities committed by these officers. The Government of India accepted the findings of this white majority, while dismissing those of its Indian members. Indian opinion was inflamed. Mahatma Gandhi echoed it in his letter to the Viceroy: "But the punitive measures taken by General Dyer, Col. Frank Johnson, Col. O'Brien, Mr. Bosworth Smith, Rai Shri Ram Sud, Mr. Malik Khan and other officers were out of all proportions to the crime...and amounted to wanton cruelty and inhumanity almost unparalleled in modern times. Your Excellency's lighthearted treatment of official crime, your exuberation of Sir Michael O'Dwyer, Mr. Montagu's despatch and above all the shameful ignorance of the Punjab events and callous disregard of the feelings of Indians betrayed by the House of Lords, have filled me with the gravest misgivings regarding the future of the empire, have estranged me completely from the present Government and have disabled me from tendering, as I have hitherto whole-heartedly tendered, my loyal cooperation." It was probably the earlier faith in the British bonafides that had led Gandhiji to insist on the amendment to the Das Resolution on the Reforms in the earlier Congress session, which ended with the words "and the Congress offers its thanks to the Rt. Hon'ble E.S. Montagu for his labours in connection with the Reforms." Gandhiji wrote later: "I felt that the Reforms, though defective could still be accepted." Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das, on the other hand, adhered firmly to the view that the Reforms ought to be rejected as wholly inadequate and unsatisfactory.

The other issue, which changed Mahatma Gandhi's political outlook was the Khilafat Movement. In his letter to Lord Chelmsford, he wrote, "Events that have happened in the last month have confirmed me in the opinion that the Imperial Government have acted in the Khilafat matter in an unscrupulous, immoral and unjust manner and have been moving from wrong to wrong in order to defend their immorality." He added: "I can retain neither respect nor affection for such a Government." It was the beginning of the non-cooperation movement. The constitutional path was no longer considered possible or feasible. The special session of the Congress was held at Calcutta to consider the new approach. Gandhiji prepared that resolution: "In view of the fact on the Khilafat question both the Indian and Imperial Governments have signally failed

in their duty towards the Musalmans of India...(and) both the said Governments have grossly neglected or failed to protect the innocent people of the Punjab and punish officers guilty of unsoldierly and barbarous behaviour towards them and have exuberated Michael O'Dwyer, who proved himself responsible for most of the official crimes and also callous to the sufferings of the people placed under his administration, and in view of the fact that the debate in the House of Commons and especially in the House of Lords betrayed a woeful lack of sympathy with the people of India and showed support of the systematic terrorism and frightfulness adopted in the Punjab, and that the latest Viceregal pronouncement is proof of absence of repentance in the matters of Khilafat and Punjab, this Congress is of the opinion that there can be no contentment in India without redress of these two wrongs, and that the only effective means to vindicate national honour and to prevent a repetition of similar wrongs in future is the establishment of Swaraj." How was it to be achieved? "This Congress is of further opinion that there is no course left open for the people of India, but to approve of adopting the policy of progressive non-violent non-cooperation until the said wrongs are righted and Swaraj is established." One of the measures adopted was "withdrawal by the candidates from election to the reformed councils and refusal on the part of voters to vote for any candidate who may, despite the Congress advice, offer himself for election." Gandhiji had become completely alienated from the British government. In an appeal to the parents of Aligarh University, he wrote, "I have undergone a complete transformation in my attitude towards the system of government under which we are labouring. To me it is Satanic even as was the system under Ravan's rule, according to the scriptures of my religion."

C.R. Das was not in favour of this part of the resolution. He was opposed to the boycott of the Councils. He suggested that a deputation should meet the British Prime Minister and if nothing came out of it, people should boycott schools, colleges and courts. But boycott of the Councils was not in the interest of the nation. B.P. Pal moved an amendment regarding council entry. Das supported him. He said that he was wholly opposed to the boycott of councils. "These are not gifts of the British government. They could be used to further the objectives of the Congress. I want to make the Councils an instrument for the attainment of Swaraj and to use the weapon, which is in the hollow of your hands to bring about full, complete Swaraj." As a great constitutional lawyer, who was used to taking advantage of the weak points of the opponents, he could see the advantage to the national cause that would accrue from the discomfiture of government in the councils.

Gandhiji was fully aware of the strong feelings of the eminent leaders on this issue. In his speech, he dwelt at some length on it :

"I now come to a burning topic, the boycott of the councils,

Sharpest differences of opinion existed regarding this, and if the house has to divide on it, it must divide. If it must divide, you will consider that it must divide on one issue, namely, whether *Swaraj* has to be gained through the councils or without the councils. If we utterly distrust the British government and we know that they are utterly unrepentent, how can you believe that the councils will lead to *Swaraj* and not tighten British hold on India ?” The issue really turned on what could be achieved by the council entry. Das and Motilal Nehru felt, not without reason, that once Congress had a majority in the councils, they would effectively thwart the functioning of the government as far as councils were concerned and they would expose the hollowness of British intentions that it was a vital step towards self-government. Non-cooperation inside the council could be more effective than non-cooperation with the councils from outside.

Gandhiji’s resolution was, however, passed including boycott of the councils. Gandhiji wrote in October 1920 : “There is little doubt now that the boycott of the councils will be extensive if it is not complete.”

The elections were held in November 1920, Two-third of the voters abstained from voting in view of the boycott of the councils by the Congress. Surendra Nath Banerjea, who was now a leading Moderate, described it in critical terms. “Non-cooperation had done its work by creating a profound sense of mistrust in British promises and pledges amongst a certain section of our people despite evidence of earnest effort to redeem them. It was in such an atmosphere that the Reform Scheme had to be launched into operation. It was in such an atmosphere and amid surroundings so unpropitious that the first General Elections under the new Act were held.” What were these surroundings according to him ? “These were the forces of Non-cooperation appealing to the electors not to vote and to the candidates not to stand.” The Council was, he said, “shunned as an unclean thing”. As for the Hindus, he maintained, “the feeling against Council entry was confined to the proposed non-cooperators and did not affect the bulk of the men of light and learning.” And these to him were only the one-third of the limited electorate. The Moderates were British blinkers and they seemed to like them. “The last council was thus fairly representative of that element”, he boasted.

C.R. Das considered the boycott of councils as a grave mistake. If the nationalists had contested the elections, they would have, according to him, carried the fight inside the citadel of the government. In their absence, Moderates were giving the imperial rule the semblance of popular support. He said in a press conference : “I was not for the boycott of the councils as I wanted to work out the principle of non-cooperation from within the councils but in obedience to the Congress resolution we withdrew our candidature”.

The resolution, prepared by Das and Mahatma Gandhi at Nagpur session in 1920, did not mention the boycott of the Councils. It demanded the resignation of Moderates who had been elected there on minority vote. But as Das had foreseen they were providing a plausible excuse for the government to take severe measures against the the nationalists. The Governor of Bengal, Lord Ronaldshay, told Das at a private meeting that the government was acting on the advice of the representatives of the people in the Council, and since they had been elected, Congress could not now challenge their representative character. It confirmed Das in his view that this mark of representative character, which the British bureaucracy was wearing under the Reforms for its repressive measures, should and must be exposed. It was the only way to impress British Parliament of the sham being perpetrated by the ruling civil servants in India.

The Civil Disobedience Enquiry Committee, set up by the Congress to report on whether the country was prepared for civil disobedience, gave the report in the negative. It was, however, divided on the issue of Council entry. The Committee Chairman, Hakim Ajmal Khan, and members, Motilal Nehru and Vithalbhai Patel, favoured it, while C. Rajagopalchari, Kasturi Ranga Iyer and Dr. Ansari were against it. Das was not enamoured of taking part in the Council. He had condemned these Reforms even when Gandhiji was in favour of giving them a trial. His stand now was made clear by him in his speech : "Reformed Councils are really a mask, which the bureaucracy has put on. I conceive it our clear duty to tear those masks off its face. To end these Councils will be the most effective boycott". He emphasized : "To end these Councils will be the most effective boycott. It is possible to achieve this if we get a majority".

It raised a storm in the Congress and was discussed with vehemence in the AICC meeting. Those who spoke in favour included Motilal Nehru, Vithalbhai Patel, Dr. M.R. Jayakar, Hakim Ajmal Khan, B.S. Moonje, A.N. Sinha and S. Satyamurti; while those who opposed it were Rajendra Prasad, Vallabhbhai Patel, Sarojini Naidu, Rajgopalachari, Dr. Ansari, Jagadguru Shankaracharya, Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya and some other leaders. The former wrote, "Times have now changed. Circumstances have altered. The period of struggle is indefinitely prolonged. Measures affecting the daily life of the people are being enacted in the legislature year after year. Fresh taxation and huge liabilities are being imposed with the help and in the name of the so-called representatives of the people and *nolens volens* the people will have to submit to them". "Suppose the Congress persists in the boycott of the Councils in its present form and it is found that a greater percentage of voters record their votes on the occasion, our claim would be discredited", they argued.

The main resolution was moved by Motilal Nehru : "Whereas the working of the Legislative Councils during first term, has, besides proving a serious impediment to the redress of the Khilafat and the Punjab wrongs and the speedy attainment of Swaraj, caused a great misery and hardship to the people, and whereas it is desirable that steps should be taken in strict accordance with the principle of non-violent non-cooperation to avoid recurrence of the evil.

"It is resolved with reference to the report of the Civil Disobedience Inquiry Committee that the All India Congress Committee do recommend to the Indian National Congress that the non-cooperators should contest the ensuing elections on the issue of the redress of the Punjab and Khilafat errands and immediate Swaraj, and make every endeavour to be returned in a majority".

This resolution needed the approval of the open session of the Congress to become effective. It was, therefore, recommended that "the matter may be again brought up for such final mandate by the Congress as it may, under the circumstances, deem fit to issue".

Motilal Nehru commended this resolution on the ground that the object of boycotting the councils was the rejection of Reforms. What was then achieved by the boycott when the Councils continued to function ? They were functioning as bodies of popular representatives and were doing a lot of mischief. The AICC should, therefore, issue a mandate to ensure that those who were thus exploiting the situation were defeated at the polls. M.R. Jayakar, in supporting the resolution, said, "The Resolution, therefore, asks you to carry out struggle with bureaucracy into a department which we have neglected and despised so far and which, in consequence, has been rendered too weak and important to reflect the popular will and which, in many cases, has been exploited by a farsighted bureaucracy for their own ends. This has to be stopped and election to the Councils must be restored and more to its normal working, in order that the true voice of the people may find expression through that medium". He agreed that the decision may be postponed to the next session but reserved the right "to agitate in the country as to what would be a proper policy for the Congress to adopt in regard to our agitation in the Councils, and give a proper mandate in this behalf".

Mrs. Sarojini Naidu made a disparaging attack on those who favoured the resolution. She said that they had no programme and that she would prefer to be in the "invincible minority that made history rather than in the disintegrated majority not sure of their intellectual or moral conviction". C. Rajagopalachari made a scathing criticism of it in brilliant articles in *Young India*. In one of them, he wrote : "Tolstoy narrates somewhere in his reminiscences, how when he was a child he was told by his chums that if he placed a grain of salt on a bird's tail, the bird would drop

helplessly into his hands, and how, acting under this advice, he used to run after the birds with a grain of salt on the palm of his hand, never realising that the placing of a grain of salt on the bird presupposed the power to catch it also. The simile is not an inapt description of the tactics of those who depend on obstruction for compelling the government to grant concessions". He asked: "How by the simple manipulation of a little invisible lever the government can leave you no other alternative either to be rendered *hors-de-combat* at any moment or to cooperate with it on its own terms, which means grateful acceptance of reforms doled out in homeopathic doses and cessation of all talk about the redress of the Punjab and the Khilafat errands".

*Young India*, in its issue of 30 November 1922, summed up the position thus:

"Five distinct groups rallied to support the proposal (Motilal Nehru's resolution). The first, represented by Motilal Nehru himself, was for entering the Councils with a large majority for total obstruction and wrecking the Councils. The second school was represented by the President, Deshbandhu Das, whose programme was to enter the Councils with a majority and move, at the first opportunity, for grant of a foundation for a true Swarajya constitution, and if that was granted, to cooperate and work on the foundation but if it was not conceded to follow the programme of total obstruction and wreck the Councils. The third school was that led by Mr. Kelkar, who, though holding on to Responsive Cooperation as the true programme, would, for the present enter the Councils on whatever mandate the Congress would give. The fourth school of Messrs Jayakar, Stokes and Malaviya stood for entry into the Councils not for wrecking but for making use of them on national lines, obstructing where desirable, cooperating when beneficial. The fifth school was for standing for "elections, with a view to refuse to take the oath."

It continued: "The House was asked to vote for the proposition without deciding which one of the five lines of action was to be adopted."

The majority of AICC members, however, were against this resolution. After protracted discussion, it was put off for decision till Gaya Conference. Those who were in favour of the change and those who were against it came to be known as "Changer" and "No Changers". Both the factions carried on a vigorous propaganda in favour of their respective positions. The changers brought out a pamphlet, "The pros and cons of Council controversy", towards the end of 1922. It was meant to influence public opinion in favour of Council entry while *Young India* was the mouthpiece of "No changers". M.R. Jayakar wrote, "When Mahatmaji is in jail, shall we not all join in saying that the country requires all sober and earnest workers whether in Councils or outside to regulate the mighty force of the awakened consciousness of the Indian



people.”

The Gaya session hastened the formation of the Swarajya Party. The “changers” and “no changers” were in no mood for accommodation or reconciliation. They both believed in Swaraj but there were fundamental differences amongst them on Council entry. The Chairman of the Reception Committee, Brij Kishore Prasad, touched on this vital subject. “The Council is peculiar institution”, he said. “Almost all the highest officials of the land are members of it. There is nothing to wonder at it when we remember that the bureaucracy does not scruple to do anything to keep its hold on the country”. He was afraid of the contamination that may result in its company. It may use blandishment to wear over the elected representatives. He advised the nationalists to keep away from them. He said, “By throwing the tempting baits, they try to entrap our countrymen. The process goes on day-to-day and yet we knowingly allow ourselves to be caught in the mesh. It is at the dinner table, in the garden parties, and in the Council Chamber where they meet us at close quarters, that they try to throw their spell over us. Therefore, it is advisable to avoid such points of contact as far as possible.” He was certain that “if we succeed in building up our organisations from the lowest to the highest unit and thus link the masses with ourselves, it will not be at all necessary to go to the Councils. We shall be able to bend the government to our will without having to enter the Council Chamber.

C.R. Das in his Presidential address to the session put forward his point of view with force and vigour at great length. Since this question was the great divide of Gaya session and brought about the formation of this party, it is necessary to give his main reasons at some length. He observed :

“Unhappily the question has become part of the controversy of change or no-change. To my mind the whole controversy proceeds on a somewhat erroneous assumption. The question is not so much as to whether there should be a change in the programme of the work ; the real question is whether it is not necessary now to change the direction of our activities in certain respects for the success of the very movement which we hold so dear.”

He gave some illustrations. Take the Bardoli Resolution, he said:

“In the matter of boycott of schools and colleges, the Bardoli Resolution alters the direction of our activity, which does not in any way involve the abandonment of the Boycott. During the Swaraj year, the idea was to bring the students out of Government schools and colleges, and if national schools were started they were regarded as concessions to the ‘weakness’ of those students. The idea was, to quote the words of Mahatma Gandhi, ‘political’ and not ‘educational’. Under the Bardoli Resolution, however, it is the establishment of schools and colleges which must be the main activity of national education. The idea is ‘educational’,

and if it still be the desire of the Congress to bring students out of Government schools and colleges, it is by offering them educational advantages. Here the boycott of schools and colleges is still upheld, but the direction of our activities is changed. In fact, such changes must occur in every revolution, violent or non-violent, as it is only by such changes that the idea is truly served."

He did not favour putting restrictions on the practical adoption of civil disobedience. He wanted the Congress to consider Council-entry in the light of the prevailing political conditions. He said:

"I am of opinion that the question of the boycott of Councils, which is agitating the country so much must be considered and decided in the light of the circumstances I have just mentioned. There is no opposition in idea between such civil disobedience as I have mentioned and the entry into the Councils for the purpose, and with the avowed object of either ending or mending them. I am not against the boycott of Councils. I am simply of opinion that the system of the Reformed Councils, with their steel frame of the Indian Civil Service covered over by a dyarchy of deadlocks and departments, is absolutely unsuitable to the nature and genius of the Indian nation. It is an attempt of the British Parliament to force a foreign system upon the Indian people. India has unhesitatingly refused to recognise this foreign system as a real foundation for *Swaraj*. With me, as I have often said, it is not a question of more or less; I am always prepared to sacrifice much for a real basis of *Swaraj*."

He exhorted: "These Councils must, therefore, be either mended or ended. Hitherto we have been boycotting the Councils from outside. We have succeeded in doing much—the prestige of the Councils is diminished, and the country knows that the people who adorn those chambers are not the true representatives of the people. But though we have succeeded in doing much, these Councils are still there."

He insisted that his proposal to enter the Councils was, in fact, to boycott them from within. This would be far more effective than doing so from outside.

"I conceive it to be our clear duty to tear this mask from off their face. The very idea of boycott implies, to my mind, something more than mere withdrawal. The boycott of foreign goods means that such steps must be taken that there may be no foreign goods in our markets. The boycott of the Reformed Councils, to my mind, means that such steps must be taken that these Councils may not be there to impede the progress of *Swaraj*. The only successful boycott of these Councils is either to mend them in a manner suitable to the attainment of *Swaraj* or to end them completely. That is the way in which I advise the nation to boycott the Councils."

He spoke of the debate in the country on the issue :

"I am emphatically of opinion that it does not offend against any

principle of non-cooperation which has been adopted and applied by the Indian National Congress. I am not dealing with logical or philosophical abstractions. I am only dealing with that which the Congress had adopted and calls non-cooperation.

In the first place, may I point out that we have not up to now non-cooperated with the bureaucracy? We have been merely preparing the people of this country to offer non-cooperation."

He quoted Nagpur Resolution in support of his views:

"Whereas in the opinion of the Congress the existing Government of India has forfeited the confidence of the country, and whereas the people of India are now determined to establish Swaraj ... now this Congress ... declares that the entire or any parts of the scheme of non-violent non-cooperation, with the renunciation of voluntary association with the present Government at one end, and the refusal to pay taxes at the other, should be put into force at a time to be determined by either the Indian National Congress, or the All-India Congress Committee and that, in the meanwhile to prepare the country for it, effective steps should continue to be taken on that behalf."

He gave another reason in support of his stand :

"In everything that the Congress commanded there is an aspect of destruction as there is an aspect of creation. The boycott of lawyers and law courts means the destruction of existing legal institutions ; and the formation of Panchayats means the creation of agencies through which justice may be administered. The boycott of schools means the destruction of the Department of Education ; and the establishment of national schools and colleges means the creation of educational institutions for the youth of India. The boycott of foreign goods followed as it was by the burning of foreign cloth means the destruction of the foreign goods already in the country and the preventing, in future, of foreign goods coming into the country. But, on the other hand, the spinning wheel and the looms means creative activity in supplying the people with indigenous cloth. Judged by this principle, what is wrong about the desire either to convert the Councils into institutions which may lead us to Swaraj, or to destroy them altogether ? The same two-fold aspect of creation and destruction is to be found in the boycott of Councils in the way I want them to be boycotted."

No changers had contended that Council entry militated against "the morality and spirituality of this movement." "Entering the Councils for the purpose of ending the Councils is unfair and dishonest," some of them said. He replied :

"The argument implies that the Reformed Councils belong entirely to the bureaucracy and the idea is that we should not enter into other people's property with a view to injure it. To my mind, the argument is based on a misconception of facts. Inadequate as the Reforms undoub-

tedly are, I do not for a moment admit that the Reforms Act was a gift of the British Parliament. It was, to quote the words of Mahatma Gandhi, 'a concession to popular agitation.' The fact is that it is the resultant of two contending forces, the desire of the people for freedom and the desire of the bureaucracy to oppose such desire."

He agreed that people of India did not like these Reforms. He reminded the delegates, "but let us not forget that the bureaucracy does not like them either."

"If the fulfilment of the very forces which have succeeded in securing the Reforms require that the Councils should either be mended or ended, if the struggle for freedom compels the adoption of either course, what possible charge of impartiality can be levelled against it? I admit the avowed object of cooperation but keeping within our hearts the desire to break the Councils, such a course would undoubtedly have been dishonest. European diplomacy, let us hope, has been abolished by the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. If we play now, we play with all our cards on the table."

He then turned to those who thought that the entry to the Councils itself was inconsistent with the ideal of non-cooperation. He argued, "Supposing the Congress had sanctioned an armed insurrection, could it be argued that entry into the fort of the bureaucracy is inconsistent with the principle of non-cooperation? Surely the charge of inconsistency must depend on the object of the entry. An advancing army does not cooperate with the enemy when it marches into the enemy's territory. Cooperation or non-cooperation must, therefore, depend on the object with which such entry is made. The argument, if analysed, comes to this that whenever the phrase "entry into Councils" is used, it calls up the association of co-operation, and then the mere idea of this entry is proclaimed to be inconsistent with non-cooperation. But this is the familiar logical fallacy of our times. Entry into the Councils to co-operate with the Government and entry into the Councils to non-cooperate with the Government are two terms and two different propositions. The former is inconsistent with the idea of non-cooperation, the latter is absolutely consistent with that very idea."

As for spirituality, he said, "What objection can there be in removing from our path by all legitimate means any obstacle to the attainment of Swaraj? We burned foreign cloth without a scruple, and the spirituality of the movement did not receive a shock when we burned them. It is as well to start with a clear conception as to what that spirituality is. Apart from any creedal or doctrinal injunction and apart from any question of morality, the basis of spirituality must be the attainment of freedom and of Swaraj. What is the duty which every human being owes not only to humanity, but also to his God? It is the right to fulfil oneself. It is the duty of living in the light of God... I look upon all national

activities as the real foundation of the service of that greater humanity, which again is the revolution of God to man. The son of God brought to the world not peace but a Sword—not the peace of death and immorality of corruption but the ‘separating sword’ of truth. We have to fight against all corruptions and all immorality. It is only thus that freedom can be attained. Whatever obstacles there may be in the path of Swaraj, either of the individual or of the nations, or humanity at large, these obstacles must be removed by the individual if he desires to fulfil itself, by all the nations of the world if the cause of humanity is to prosper. That being the spirituality of the movement as I understand it, I am prepared to put away all obstacles that lie between the Indian nation and the attainment of its freedom, not stealthily but openly, reverently in the name of Truth and God. Judged from this ideal of spirituality, the entry into the Councils for the purpose I have stated is necessary to advance the cause of truth. Everything in connection with the controversy must be judged by that standard.”

He said that “members of the Civil Disobedience Enquiry Committee who were in favour of Council Entry merely wanted the members of the Congress to stand as candidates. It was, however, a little disingenuous on his part to desist their doubts on the taking of oath or to securing majority in the legislatures.” He argued like a skilled debator and a consummate lawyer who had a brief to prove and used all arguments to do so. “The oath,” he said, “is an institutional one. The King stands for the Constitution, It binds those who take it first, not to make any use of powers which are not allowed by the Reforms Act; secondly, to discharge their duties faithfully. So far as the first point is concerned, there is nothing in my suggestion which militates against it. So far as the second point is concerned, I am aware that a forced interpretation has been sought to be put upon it, namely, that a member taking to oath is bound to discharge his duties faithfully to the bureauacy. All that I need say is, that there is no constitutional authority of any kind to justify that interpretation. To my mind, the words mean a faithful discharge of a member’s duties to his constituency by the exercise of powers recognised under the Reforms Act. I do not, therefore, understand what possible objection there may be to take the oath.”

No-changers asked what would the changers do even if they got majority? C.R. Das answered that they would state their inherent rights and claims “for the particular system of government which we may choose for ourselves. If our demands are accepted, then the fight is over.” If these demands are not met, then he said, “We must non-cooperate with the bureaucracy by opposing each and every work of the Council.” He agreed that the government had the power of certification. “But Government by certification is just as impossible as Government by veto,” he asserted.

"Another question is often asked," he mentioned "Suppose we end these Reformed Councils, what then?" He argued, "Could not the same question be asked with regard to every step the Congress has hitherto undertaken in the way of breaking, or destroying institutions. If we had succeeded in destroying the Educational Department, might not somebody ask : What then ? If we had succeeded in destroying the legal institutions, might not the question be put with equal relevance ? The fact is, destruction itself will never bring us Swaraj. The fact further is that no construction is possible without destruction. We must not forget that it is not this activity or that activity which by itself can bring Swāraj. It is the totality of our national activity in the way of destruction and in the way of creation that will bring Swaraj. If we succeed demolishing these Reformed Councils, you will find the whole nation astir with life. Let them put other obstacles in our way ; we shall remove them with added strength and greater vitality."

Some of the 'no changers' had expressed their doubts that the bureaucracy would never let them enter the Councils. "If any such rule is framed I should welcome it and again change the direction of our activity," he told them.

The reasons for Council entry were compelling, according to him. "The work of the Councils for the last two years has made it necessary for non-cooperators to enter the Councils," he emphasized. "The bureaucracy has received added strength from these Reformed Councils, and those who have entered the Councils, speaking generally, have practically helped the cause of bureaucracy. What is most necessary to consider is the fact that the taxation has increased by leaps and bounds." He concluded this part of his speech with a warning :

"I warn my countrymen against the policy of allowing these Reformed Councils to work their wicked will. There will undoubtedly be a further increase of taxation and there is an apprehension in my mind. I desire to express it with all the emphasis that I can command, that if we allow this policy of drift to continue, the result will be that we shall lose the people who are with us today. Let us break the Councils if the bureaucracy does not concede to the demands of the people. If there is fresh taxation, as it is bound to be, let the responsibility be on the bureaucracy. Then you and I and the people will jointly fight the powers that be.

The powerful plea put forward by C.R. Das as President of Congress did not bring about any change of heart in the no-changers, C. Rajagopalachari moved the resolution that "all voters shall abstain from standing as candidates for any of the Councils and from voting for any candidate offering himself as such in disregard of the advance"... Motilal Nehru's amendment was lost and Rajagopalachari's motion was passed on 31 December 1922. "This ended the fate of the Council entry

proposal," moaned M.R. Jayakar.

The All-India Congress Committee met on 1 January 1923 and C.R. Das announced his resignation from the Presidentship of the Congress. In his statement, he said that "there are at least in the Congress at present two schools of thought with fundamental differences but there is no reason why all of us should not remain within the Congress." He could not associate with most of the resolutions passed in the session. He was thus left with the option "either to retire from public life or form a separate party within the Congress." "I must, therefore, work with those who believe in my programme." All efforts at compromise had proved futile. He confessed that "every reasonable proposal for compromise was rejected, every suggestion for postponement of the discussion of the Council question was negatived." He felt sorry that "even a motion of adjournment of the discussion was rejected by the Congress."

#### IV

C.R. Das and Motilal Nehru held a meeting at the residence of Maharaja of Tokari at Gaya on the same day and formed a new party. It was called Congress Khilafat Swarajya Party. 'Congress Khilafat' was dropped a little later and it became Swarajya Party. It issued its manifesto, which was subscribed by over a hundred persons. Prominent amongst them were C.R. Das, Motilal Nehru, Hakim Ajmal Khan, V.J. Patel, Sherwani, Kelkar, M.V. Abhyankar, B.S. Moonje, R.R. Sahani, A. Rangaswamy Iyengar, M.R. Jayakar and Satyamurti. The manifesto of the new party was as follows:

"Whereas we are convinced that several important items in the programme of work adopted by the Gaya Session of the Indian National Congress are not conducive to the speedy attainment of Swaraj and we are further of the opinion that several other important items have been rejected, we do hereby form and constitute ourselves into a party within the Congress. The party will be called the Congress Khilafat Swaraj party. It accepts the creed of the Congress, viz., the attainment of Swaraj by all peaceful and legitimate means and also the principle of non-violent non-cooperation."

C.R. Das was appointed the President of the party and Motilal Nehru, B.N. Sasmal, Vithalbhai Patel, Choudhary Khaliq-uz-Zaman as the Secretaries. The party decided to have its own organization and programme of work.

The Swarajya Party was an affirmation of the principle that Gandhiji himself had enunciated in the "Congress and Non-cooperation." He wrote, "the reason for asking me to suspend action is that the Congress will presently meet and consider the whole question of non-cooperation and give its verdict. It would, therefore, be better (says Panditji) to

await the Congress decision. In my humble opinion, it is not Congressman's duty to consult the Congress before taking action in a matter in which he has no doubts. To do otherwise, may mean stagnation." What was one to do in such cases? Gandhiji said, "But when one has unshakable faith in a particular policy or action. . . one must act and demonstrate its efficacy so as to command acceptance by the nation." He further said, "My loyalty to the Congress requires me to carry out its policy when it is not contrary to my conscience." Those who initiated the Swarajya Party had acted according to the tenets of the Mahatma. He was emphatic that "every Congressman, every public body has the right; it is sometimes their duty, to express their own opinion, act upon it even and thus anticipate the verdict of the Congress. Indeed, it is the best way of serving the nation." "By initiating well-thought-out policies," Gandhiji affirmed, "we furnish data for a deliberative body like the Congress to enable it to form a well-informed opinion." It was his conviction that, "the Congress cannot express national opinion without any definiteness unless at least some of us have already firm views about a particular course of conduct. If all suspended their opinion, the Congress must necessarily suspend its own also."

Das explained the position at Bombay. "There are two parties in the Congress. Two-thirds take one view and one-third another view, but they are accustomed to look upon the Congress as a sacred institution." His party merely wanted to educate the country on issues involved in this controversy: "I am content to leave the great issues which are agitating their minds to the decision and the judgment of the country and by that judgment all the parties in the Congress should abide."

What was meant by the boycott of Councils? Did it not mean the destruction of Councils? he asked. What did they wish to achieve by asking the voters to abstain from voting if not, that seats should be vacant and Government could not carry on the Government? It was thus a protest against the Reforms Act. Das said that his method to achieve the same results through Council entry was more practical and effective. He was merely creating the non-cooperation within the Councils, by fighting the bureaucracy in its own citadel.

What was the position of this party *vis-a-vis* the Congress? Das repeatedly stated that it was a party within the Congress. The draft constitution, however, prepared by the Drafting Committee tended to give the impression as if it were an independent party. Article 1 stated: "This party will be open to all who accept the goal of Swaraj for India, to be attained by all legitimate and peaceful means." Article 2 referred to the elections to the Councils and the conditions under which they will be fought. The party will set-up nationalist candidates. After election, they will put forward "legitimate demands as formulated by the party". If these demands are not granted, then its elected members will "adopt a



policy of uniform, continuous and constant obstruction within the Councils". No member of the party will accept office. Article 5 stated that "the party will accord its full support to the carrying out of the constructive programme of the Congress". This unfortunate breach in the Congress tended to weaken it.

## V

Efforts were made by leaders like Abul Kalam Azad to patch up the differences which had arisen in the party after the Gaya Session. He prepared a scheme of settlement which was approved by the Working Committee of the Congress. The compromise arrived at did not bring about a change of hearts. It merely suspended active hostility and propaganda against each other. It was described by a leader of the Swarajya party as "armed neutrality". Motilal Nehru said "it had materially prejudiced both." No further compromise was possible with C. Rajagopalachari, Vallabhbhai Patel and Jamuna Lal Bajaj who opposed it. Motilal Nehru issued a circular on 1 May 1923: "It is now abundantly clear that the only possible compromise between the two parties must permit entry into the Councils either by the withdrawal or suspension of the boycott. . . . and I can conceive of no arrangement acceptable to the Swarajya Party, which ignores this obvious fact and I can confidently assert that the Swaraj Party will not desist from contesting the forthcoming elections."

"What is the clear duty of every true Congressman? he asked. "Is this the time to wait and look on, while the Moderates and hangers on the bureaucracy are putting forth strenuous efforts to give the country another three years of Government by a mock parliament."

The efforts at compromise, however, continued. The AICC met in Bombay in May 1923 and Purshottam Das Tandon's compromise resolution was adopted which stated that "Congress shall close up their ranks and present a united front. It, therefore, directs that no propaganda be carried on amongst voters in furtherance of Resolution No. 6 of the Gaya Congress relating to the boycott of Councils". The special session of the Congress held in Delhi passed this resolution: "This Congress declares that such Congressmen as have no religious or other conscientious objections against entering the legislatures, are at liberty to stand as candidates and to exercise the right of voting at the forthcoming elections, and this Congress, therefore, suspends all propaganda against Councils." In support of his stand, C.R. Das said: "Mahatma Gandhi wants to wreck the Reforms and I do the same thing working from within and the only way to do it is to make Government through Councils impossible. He had throughout been in favour of a commonly accepted programme and not a victory for Swarajya Party." "It would be useless because united Congress was much better than the victory I could secure."

The Cocanada session of Congress in the end of December 1923 put a seal on this compromise. The chief spokesman of the no-changers, C. Rajagopalachari, while moving the resolution said, "We do not want to ask those who have entered the Councils to come out. The fact that we gave them permission at Delhi remains without being extended or reduced by a single inch or fraction of an inch". Vallabhbhai Patel said that Delhi resolution was an accomplished fact and it would be dishonourable to repudiate it now. Amongst those who opposed the resolution was Pattabhi Sitaramayya who observed, "It was never contemplated in the history of non-cooperation resolution in respect of Council entry." The resolution was put to vote and carried.

## VI

With Mahatma Gandhi in prison and the non-cooperation almost at a standstill and confined to sporadic speeches and resolution and the slow pace of constructive work, it was the Council entry programme, which sustained political interest and created enthusiasm among the people.

The Swarajya party prepared its Manifesto on 'wrecking the Constitution from within the Reformed Councils' and issued it on 14 October 1923. As the title suggested, it was explicit in its aims and in pursuance of its intentions as expressed by Das in the forms of Congress and elsewhere, i.e., to achieve an effective boycott of Councils from within. The members of the Legislative Assembly elected on its ticket will demand that the British Government and the British Parliament forthwith concede and give effect to "the right of the people of India to control the existing machinery and system of Government". The Government of India, it said, could not take the plea that it had no power under the Act to entertain such a demand. Its position was "precisely what the late Lord Morley said, viz., it was that of an agent of the British Cabinet". "The demand, thus, will be addressed to the principal through the accredited agent as soon as practicable after the results of the elections are declared and before the legislative session begins, in such manner and form as the elected members of the party may determine".

The action taken on the demand by the Government of India would determine the attitude of the elected members. "If the right itself is conceded, it will be a matter for negotiation between the Government and the nationalist members in the Assembly as to the manner in which the right is to be given effect to." If, however, the demand is neither entertained nor after agreement acceptable terms offered, then the elected members of the Assembly and the Provincial Council will resort to a policy of "uniform, continuous and consistent obstruction with a view to make the working of the Government through the Assembly and Councils impossible".

To meet the objection of the Government that it had been given little time between the election of the members and the meeting of legislatures to take action on it, copies of this Manifesto were sent simultaneously to Delhi and India Office.

The All-India Swarajya Party Conference was held on 16-17 August 1924, "to restate its policy and programme in detail in the light of experience gained in the Assembly and the different Councils, and in view of the recent developments in the political situation in India." . . . "Now, the Swarajya Party declares that the guiding principle of the party is self-reliance in all activities which make for the healthy growth of the nation and resistance to the bureaucracy as it impedes the nation's progress towards Swarajya."

It adopted the following programme. Within legislative bodies, wherever possible, the Party shall :

- "a. refuse supplies and throw out Budgets unless and until the system of Government is altered in recognition of our rights;
- b. throw out all proposals for legislative enactments by which the bureaucracy proposes to consolidate its power;
- c. move resolutions and bills necessary for the healthy growth of national life;
- d. help the constructive programme of the Indian National Congress;
- e. follow a definite economic policy to prevent the chain of public wealth from India;
- f. protect rights of labour, agricultural and industrial, and adjust relations between the landlords and tenants, capitalists and workmen."

Elected members were debarred from accepting any office, "i.e. the gift of the Government with or without salary or other remuneration". The members, however, could seek election "to every post and place in the Assembly or the Councils and on their Committees which may open to them for election", which were not in contravention of the rules framed by the members of the Party in the Assembly or the Councils.

It would be seen that between the intentions of the Manifesto and the reality of the policy and programme of the Swarajya party fell the shadow of the composition of the Reformed Councils. The membership was so distributed and the electorate so restricted, divided by the Act that it would, to modify the famous proverb, be easier for the camel to pass through the eye of the needle than the Indian nationalist to pass through the gates of the Assembly and the Councils in a majority. For example, out of 145 members in the Assembly, 41 members were nominated, and out of 104 elected members, 52 distributed amongst sectional, communal

and vested interests and only 52 remained in the general category called "non-Muhammedans". The Councils were similarly weighed to ensure that absolute majority to any party was well-nigh impossible to attain. It was, therefore, a real achievement that despite all these impediments-Swarajya Party won majority in Bengal and the Central Provinces and significant representation in several other provinces. Congress had stirred nationalism in Indian breasts and Swarajya Party had channelled it into the citadel of the ruling bureaucracy and further raised national consciousness amongst the people.

## VII

Gandhiji was released to undergo operation for appendicitis and went in March to Juhu for convalescence. He resumed the editorship of *Young India* and wrote on all subjects except on Council entry, which divided Congressmen all over the country. He had only indirectly made reference to it in the beginning while writing on non-violence. "Even the the 'changers' and 'no-changers' have flung mud against one another. Each has claimed the monopoly of truth and with an ignorant uncertainty of conviction sworn at the other for the helpless stupidity."

C.R. Das and Motilal Nehru went to see him in April to convince him of their standpoint. Gandhiji remained unconvinced but he did not wish to put any impediments in their way. He said: "After having discussed with the Swarajists friends, the vexed question of entry into the Assembly and the Councils by Congressmen, I have not been able to see eye to eye with the Swarajists. I have failed to be convinced by their arguments". The difference between his and their point of view was not of mere details. "There is an honest and fundamental difference. I retain the opinion that Council entry is inconsistent with non-cooperation, as I conceive it". And this difference was not merely of the interpretation of the word 'non-cooperation'. It "relates to the essential mental attitude that the success or failure of the triple boycott is to be judged, and not by the actual results attained." His view was that "to be out of the legislative bodies is far more advantageous to the country than to be in them." He accepted that, he was equally unable to convince his Swarajists friends. But did not want them to give up their stand. "I recognize", he said that, "so long as they think otherwise, their place is undoubtedly in the Councils. It is the best for all of us".

He fully accepted their bonafides. "There are many of them who are amongst the ablest, most experienced and honest patriots. They have not entered the legislative bodies, without fullest deliberation, and they must not be expected to retire from the position until experience has convinced them of the futility of their method". It was not the time to discuss its merits or demerits. "The question is, what is to be done regarding

Council entry as a settled fact? What was the duty of non-cooperators in the circumstances—to thwart them or extend help to them, if possible.”

Gandhiji referred to the Delhi and Cocanada resolutions which had permitted Council entry. The Swarajists, therefore, expect “perfect neutrality on the part of ‘no-changers’.” If they succeeded, it would convince a sceptic like him of his error. If they failed, they should retrace their steps. He will thus, be “no party to putting any obstacles in their way or to carrying on any propaganda against Swarajists’ entry into the legislatures”.

As for him, “I would enter a legislative body, if only I found that I could use it to advantage. If, therefore, I enter the Councils, I should, without following a general policy of obstruction, endeavour to give strength to the constructive programme of the Congress”. It would be seen how the views of Gandhiji had materially influenced the policy and programme of the Swarajya Party outlined above.

He advised the ‘no-changers’ “not to worry about what the Swarajists are doing or saying . . . (they) can justify their opposition to the Council entry only by showing the results of their applications to the constructive programme”.

On another occasion, Gandhiji observed, “Frank recognition of honest differences will accelerate the country’s progress as a patched up compromise designed to hide differences would have retarded it.”

## VIII

The Swarajists became an effective power in the Assembly and the Councils to reckon with by the Government. Under the guidance of Das and Motilal Nehru, they stretched the powers of these bodies to the maximum to influence or embarrass the ruling bureaucracy. As for the local government, prominent Congressmen became presidents of municipalities all over the country. C.R. Das was elected the first Mayor of Calcutta; Vithalbhai Patel, President of the Bombay Corporation; Vallabhabhai Patel of Ahmedabad Municipality; Jawaharlal Nehru of Allahabad Municipality and Rajendra Prasad of Patna Municipality. These local bodies were no longer at the beck and call of the white sahibs. The Bombay Corporation and Ahmedabad Municipality presented addresses to Gandhiji. Poona Municipality put up a statue of Tilak in the municipal market by defying government orders. The elected chiefs of Bombay, Karachi and Calcutta refused to attend official functions given in honour of the Viceroy’s visits to these cities. Local bodies acted with courage under the nationalists and infused national pride amongst the people. They gave practical demonstration of what could be achieved with whatever power they were able to wrest from the government. It was, however, not an unmixed blessing because through subtle ways those

who did not like Indians to share power (or exercise it) were playing on the feelings of certain communities,

Gandhiji was not unaware of these developments. As has been seen, he was unconvinced of the wisdom of Council entry. In June 1924, he moved four resolutions in the AICC which were designed to make fundamental changes in the qualifications for membership and franchise of the Congress. It created serious controversy between the Swarajists and Gandhiji. It led to the walk-out of the meeting by Swarajists led by Das, Motilal and Srinivas Iyengar. They returned the next day but Das vehemently attacked the resolution on Gopinath Saha. Gandhiji wrote, Those who spoke in support of his (Das) proposition did not mince matters. They had room for political murder in their philosophy and after all it is not a common philosophy". The discussions in the AICC had shown that "the two methods represent two opposition mentalities. . (and). . . for one organization, to work for both is to weaken both and to damage the national cause". He now did not think that both could co-exist together. "Whilst one view claims to give political education through the Councils, the other school claims to give it exclusively by working among the people and evoking its organizing and administrative capacity." This logic seems a little beyond the capacity of an ordinary person to follow; Swarajists, as far as can be seen, never questioned the wisdom of constructive work. They fully endorsed it. Elections to the Councils also served the national programme. Organizing elections amongst the electorate, educating them to their needs and responsibilities and carrying on election propaganda amongst people in accordance with the Swarajists manifesto created national consciousness against the Raj in them. People were being asked to challenge the foreign rule through their vote, Once elected, the fight was carried on day-to-day basis inside the Councils. If this is not political education, then what else it is. But Gandhiji probably had in mind educating the masses in non-violent, non-cooperation, Hindu-Muslim unity, etc.

He continued in the same vein. "One teaches to look up to a government for progress, the other tries to show that even the most ideal government plays among a self-governing people the least important part in national growth." It was, indeed, an ideal state and ideal citizen to which Gandhiji strove the nation to reach. He admitted that, "Unfortunately, I was unable to convince my Swarajist friends of this obvious truth."

## X

The Government of Bengal struck at the Swarajists and accused C.R. Das and his followers of paralysing the functioning of the government. The Governor of Bengal promulgated an ordinance on

25 October 1924 and made wholesale arrests and searches of houses. Police also raided Congress and Swarajya Party offices. It carried away all books and documents of the party.

A wave of horror and anger swept through the country and even those like Jinnah and Sastri, who were against Swarajist programme, condemned this action. Gandhiji wrote in *Young India*, "Deshbandhu Das by his work in the Bengal Council has shown that the Bengal Government has not the popular opinion behind it. The theory that he has set up a system of terrorism must be rejected. . . . You cannot win popular elections by terrorism nor can you hold a large party together by it." Deshbandhu's popularity must be based on his innate qualities in politics. "There is something inherently commendable to people," Gandhiji wrote, "to make Desbandhu the undisputed master of his larger party in Bengal." The reason was simple. "He wants power for the people. He does not bend the knee to rulers. He is impatient to release Bengal and India from the triple burden." Gandhiji said that "I have my differences with Deshbandhu, but they cannot blind me to his burning patriotism or his great sacrifice. He loves the country just as much as the best of us." He was totally opposed to their summary arrest and special trial. "The summary arrest of such men under extraordinary powers is the surest condemnation of the existing system of Government. It is wrong, it is uncivilized for a microscope minority of men to live in the millions under the protection of the bayonet, gun powder and arbitrary powers".

In the circumstances created by the repression in Bengal, Gandhiji resolved to strengthen the Swaraj Party, and along with C.R. Das and Motilal Nehru issued a statement in Calcutta on 6 November. It said "...this repression is aimed in reality not at any party of violence but at the Swarajya Party in Bengal, and, therefore, at constitutional and orderly activity." It stated that the Congress should now suspend the programme of non-cooperation as the national programme. It enjoined that different sections of Congress should undertake different types of work and "the work in connection with the central and provincial legislatures should be carried on by the Swarajya Party on behalf of the Congress as an integral part of the Congress organisation and for such work the Swaraj Party should make its own rules and administer its own funds".

Gandhiji made significant comment on it. "The argument puts the Swarajists at par with the 'no-changers'. . . . Swarajists claim to be a growing body. That they have made an impression on the government cannot be gainsaid. Opinions may differ as to its value but it is not possible to question the fact itself." He agreed that, "they have introduced a new spirit into the Indian legislatures". He extended his support to them in their work "through an uncompromising non-changer. I must not only tolerate their attitude and work with them but I must even

strengthen them wherever I can."

No-changers severely criticized Gandhiji for this statement. He understood that "no-changers are intensely dissatisfied with the agreement arrived at between the Swarajists and myself. . . . Many no-changers regard it as a lapse, if not a betrayal". English papers had charged that the Swarajist Party was a party of violence. Imperialism breeds in its bureaucracy the habit of attributing sedition in constitutional expression of independent opinion. "Such charges", Gandhiji said, "were I know levelled even against the late Dadabhai Naoroji and Justice Ranade. They were suspected and shadowed." Gandhiji knew where his duty lay. "I would have been false to the country", he declared, "if I had not stood by the Swarajya Party in the hour of its need...even though I do not believe in the efficacy of Council entry or even some of the methods of conducting council warfare."

The Swarajya Party remained a part of the Congress and Gandhiji accepted this position. "But recognition of the party as an integral part of the Congress...means an admission that the Swaraj Party is a strong and growing wing of the Congress...(its) claim to a definite official recognition is irresistible." He had come round to the conclusion that "it is in the interest of the country to give the Swarajya Party the fullest possible chance of working out its programme without let or hindrance from no-changers". "Swarajya Party", in his view, "is a party of orderly progress." It had become an important wing of the Congress. Thanks to the persuasive power of C.R. Das aided by Motilal Nehru. "It occupies a prominent position in the Congress...it might not be found to even occupy a predominant position. . . . I will not weaken it by disowning or denouncing it or by retiring from the Congress," Gandhiji said.

## XI

C.R. Das died on 16 June 1925. It was a great loss to the nation, it was a severe blow to the Swarajya Party. He was the spirit behind Council entry and lent his name, dignity, immense eloquence and resources to its formation and acceptance by the Congress. It is doubtful if without his strength, able guidance and persuasive power this party could even have come out of its initial stages. It is also true that the able support and guidance of Motilal Nehru equally helped this party to come out of its teaching troubles and become the most powerful political wing of the Congress in the twenties. Together they were a power of strength and almost invincible. But deprived of the invaluable partnership of Das, all the burdens and care of sustaining it fell on Motilal Nehru, who himself unfortunately was not in good health at the time. With some premonition, Das had written to Nehru a little before his death, "The most critical time in our history is coming. There must be



solid work done at the end of the year and the beginning of the next, our resources will be taxed, and here we are both of us ill. God knows what will happen."

Gandhiji wrote, "In constructing with Pandit Motilal Nehru...the great and growing Swarajya Party...Deshbandhu showed determination, originality, resourcefulness and contempt of consequences." "And today", he said, "the Swarajya Party is compact, well-disciplined organisation." He then stated his position clearly: "My differences about the Council entry were and are fundamental, but I never doubted the usefulness of Council entry for the purpose of embarrassment and continuously putting the Government in the wrong." Gandhiji now accepted the useful role of this party. "No one can deny the greatness of the work done by the party in the Council. And the credit for it must predominantly belong to Deshbandhu."

He extended his support to the party in whatever way he could. "I have since done my little best to help the party. His death renders it doubly my duty to stand by the Swarajya Party now that the leader is gone. I shall do nothing to impede its progress where I may not be able to help."

The British Government was not responsive to the demands of Indian nationalists for greater responsible government in India. Earl Birkenhead, Secretary of State for India, in his speech to the House of Lords on 7 July 1925, gave a biased account of the functioning of dyarchy in the country. He blamed the Swarajya Party for its destructive role in the Council.

The Swaraj Party executive met on 16 July 1925 and apart from Motilal Nehru, Vithalbhai Patel, Jayakar and some others, it was attended by Gandhiji. It stood by what C.R. Das had said in his last speech at Faridpur on 2 May 1925. "If I were satisfied that the present Act has transferred any real responsibility to the people...I would unhesitatingly cooperate with the Government and begin the constructive work within the Council Chamber. But I am not willing to sacrifice the substance for the shadow," he said. But "the basis of the present Act is distrust of the Ministers, and there can be no talk of cooperation in an atmosphere of distrust". He demanded that, "Swaraj in the fullest sense must be guaranteed to us at once to come automatically in the near future". He asked the government to "divest itself of its wide discretionary power, . . . general amnesty of all political prisoners. . . . fullest recognition of our rights to the establishment of Swaraj within the Commonwealth . . . (and) a sure and sufficient foundation of such Swaraj should be laid at once". The meeting concluded that the speech of Lord Birkenhead had made "the chances of honourable cooperation difficult, if not impossible".

Gandhiji had come to the conclusion that the British government was not sincere in its intentions to give responsible government to the Indians.

He absolved the Swarajya Party of its obligations under Gandhi-Das-Nehru Pact concluded the previous year. The Congress could "no longer be a predominantly spinning association." The speech of Birkenhead had created a serious political situation. Gandhiji decided that "the influence of the Swarajya Party need to be increased". "I would fail in my duty," he emphasized, "if I neglected a single step within my power to increase the strength of the party. And this could be done, if the Congress became a predominantly political body. Under the pact, the Congress activity is restricted to the constructive programme." He wrote to Motilal Nehru: "Under the altered circumstances that face the country now. . . (AICC should) place the whole machinery of the National Congress at your disposal so as to enable you to bring before that body such political resolutions as you may consider necessary in the interest of the country." Gandhiji offered himself at the disposal of Motilal Nehru "in all such matters in which I can conscientiously serve you and the Swarajya Party."

The AICC met at Patna on 22 September 1925, and took a vital step in its role as a political organization. "It is resolved," it said, "that the Congress do take up and carry on all such political work as may be necessary in the interest of the country and for this purpose do employ the whole machinery and fund of the Congress." It was, however, passed after hot contest from no-changers.

Gandhiji defended this decision of the AICC. He wrote, "The Council programme, which was being worked by the Swaraj Party in the name of the Congress, will now be worked by the Congress through the Swarajya Party." It was indeed an invaluable victory for the stand C.R. Das and Motilal Nehru had taken over the years. They stood vindicated at the bar of history.

## XII

The hour of triumph of Swarajya Party within the movement was also its most difficult in the country. The imperial bureaucracy took it as a challenge and decided to weaken the party by using its unrivalled position in government and the patronage available to it to entice its members, create dissensions by all means available to it and encourage the growth of sectional parties and leadership opposed to impede national aspirations. There was a mushroom growth of faceless leadership given face-lift by the agents of imperialism. The Punjab Unionist Nationalist Party was brought into being in 1924 and an Independent Party was formed in the Assembly under the ambitious leadership of Jinnha. The Justice Party of Madras was nurtured by the Government to stem the tide of nationalism.

In Bengal Council, the independents, who had supported the Swarajya Party, could no longer be counted upon. An independent

defeated the Swarajist candidate for the Presidentship of the Council. Some of the members elected on Swarajya ticket became ministers, executive councillors, accepted other perquisites against the express policy or permission of the party executive. Vithalbhai Patel, a stalwart of the party, accepted the Presidentship of the Legislative Assembly. His predecessor had appealed for cooperation. "I also plead for cooperation," he declared. His cooperation, of course, was based on rationalist demands even though he had resigned from the party on elevation to the Presidentship of the Assembly. Gandhiji's warning was, "I cannot help saying that it is a healthy rule to prohibit members of the Swarajya Party from meeting or seeing government officials without the permission of the party."

It created a storm in the Swarajaya Party. Persons like Jayakar and Dr. Moonje wanted the Swarajists to accept offices to adopt responsive cooperation with the Government. It had earlier been demanded by Kelkar of Maharashtra.

C.R. Das had given an effective answer to it in his address to the session of the Bengal Provincial Conference held in Sirajganj in June 1924. "We will not shrink from destroying any system which stands against our system," he said. He further said: "We cannot build our system without destroying your system . . . not that there is a particular pleasure in destruction, but we cannot build unless we remove something which stands in our way." He wanted the full support of his party: "I appeal to you—I make no appeal to the bureaucracy or the Secretary of State—stand fast by the principle which the Swarajists have put forward before the country." The great moving force of the party was no longer at the helm of affairs and the smell of power after joining the Councils was too much of a temptation for weak minds. The Swarajya Party had persons of different shades of national outlook in its fold. Jawaharlal Nehru in his *Autobiography* wrote: "From the earliest days, there were fissiparous tendencies in it, for many careerists and opportunists had been drawn into it by the possibilities of personal advancement through the Councils. There were also some genuine Moderates in it, who were inclined to more cooperation with the government. As soon as these tendencies appeared on the surface after the elections, they were denounced by the party leadership." Motilal Nehru, in the words of his illustrious son, "did not hesitate to cut off a diseased limb from the party".

Those Swarajists like Jayakar, Kelkar, Moonje and Aney, who believed in 'Responsive Cooperation' started a separate party, which, according to its President, B. Chakravarti, "was a party within the Congress; none but members of the Indian National Congress are eligible to become its members". And 'Responsive Cooperation', according to its Manifesto, meant "working the Reforms; unsatisfactory, disappointing and inadequate as they are, for all they are worth and using the same

for accelerating the grant of full responsible Government”.

### XIII

Motilal Nehru outlined the policy of the Swarajya Party at Bombay where he had gone to contain the revolt of these Swarajists. This party, he said was a party of action and not wedded to any dogma. Its goal remained the same but its tactics may vary in accordance with the emerging situation. If it helped achievement of Congress objectives, it may cooperate with the government. If non-cooperation helped those objectives, the party will non-cooperate with the government. There was thus a certain flexibility in its behaviour within the legislature, which the no-changers did not perhaps fairly describe as a change of its ideology. Some of the hardliners considered them indistinguishable from others in the legislatures, who were openly siding with the government.

The Responsive Cooperationists in Bombay joined Independents to form the Indian National Party. Motilal Nehru considered it a challenge to the Swarajya Party. There were, however, attempts made to bring back again the dissidents to the fold. A meeting was held at Sabarmati on 20 April 1926, where Gandhiji was also present. They agreed that the government response to the national demand put forward in the Assembly in 1924 would be considered satisfactory if, “in the provinces, the power, responsibility and initiative necessary for the effective discharge of their duties are secured to the ministers”. It came to be known as Sabarmati Pact.

The hardliners in the Congress thought it would be a signal for the Swarajists to join as ministers. Motilal Nehru put two conditions : one, responsibility of ministers will be only to the legislatures; two, adequate finances for nation-building departments.

## **CONGRESS SOCIALIST PARTY**

### **The Origin of the All-India Congress Socialist Party**

The formation of the All India Congress Socialist Party in 1934 was a very important chapter in the history of Socialism in India. The party was formed through the culmination of a series of events between the period 1931 and 1934. It was founded as a result of the feelings of grave resentment among the Congress Socialists and other radicals with the policies and programmes of the Indian National Congress. The failure of the Civil Disobedience Movements of 1930 and 1932, coupled with the failure of two Round Table Conferences created an atmosphere of dejection and depression throughout the country. Added to it, was the domination of the Gandhian Right Wing tendencies, which compelled the young radical Congressmen to give organisational expression to their feelings. These leftist Congressmen felt convinced of the need for giving a new orientation to the nationalist movement, alongwith a redefinition of its objectives and revision of its method.

The events which led to the formation of the All India Congress Socialist Party can best be analysed in the perspective of events immediately preceding 1934. In July 1931, a number of Congressmen imbued with Marxian-Socialism had organised a Socialist Party in Bihar under the leadership of Jaya Prakash Narayan. It was the first organisation in country, which was formed on an ideological basis of the future All India Congress Socialist Party. The Bihar Socialist Party soon became the spearhead of the Socialist Movement in the country. From its very inception, every member of the Bihar Socialist Party was required to be a member of the Indian National Congress. The persons, who played an important role in the formation of the party were: Jaya Prakash Narayan, Phulan Prasad Verma and Rahul Sankritayan, etc. The Party had set the following two main objectives before it:

- (i) Propagation of the Socialist ideas;
- (ii) Formation of labour and peasants' organisation.

An organising committee of the Party was established with Abdul Bari as President, Ganga Sharan Sinha and P. P. Verma as Secretaries and

**Ambika Kant Sinha as the Treasurer. The Provincial Party started well but soon the revival of the Civil Disobedience Movement in January 1932 and the arrest of most of its leaders crippled its activities.**

**Apart from Bihar, Socialists were also active in Benaras. Sometime in March 1930, their leader, Sampurnanand, had published a booklet entitled "When We Are In Power", which contained a comprehensive list of the Socialist programmes. The booklet was widely distributed and it even drew serious attention of the Government. The main programme as stated in it were as follow:**

- (i) Abolition of Zamindari with compensation;**
- (ii) Consolidation of holding;**
- (iii) Nationalisation of key-industries and principal means of transport;**
- (iv) Fixation of minimum wages and maximum hours of work;**
- (v) Provision of work or maintenance, also, old-age pension;**
- (vi) Every woman to have leave on full-pay, one month before and after accouchment;**
- (vii) Food and free elementary education to be provided by the State to every child whose parents cannot afford these;**
- (viii) Total prohibition;**
- (ix) No salt tax.**

**However, it was not till May 1934 that the Benaras group of Socialist could form a Socialist Party. Prominent among those who formed it were: Sampurnanand, Tarapada Bhattacharya, Kamlapati Tripathi and Paripurnanand.**

**Thus in Benaras, as in many other places, interest in Socialism was rapidly growing. The people mostly from middle class intelligentsia fell under the influence of Socialist ideas, and they believed that sooner or later, it is the ideology of Socialism which would relieve the Congress of the morass into which it had fallen.**

**Similar to the Bihar Provincial Socialist Party, the leftist minded Congressmen of other provinces also started organising themselves and soon Socialist parties were formed in U.P., Punjab, Delhi and Bombay. In U.P., as noticed above, a Socialist Party was formed in May 1934, under the leadership of Sampurnanand. In the Punjab, sometime in September 1933, leftist Congressmen thoroughly disgusted with the role of New Jawan Bharat Sabha, formed the Punjab Socialist Party, as a platform of the militant left Nationalists. The Party's headquarters was at Lahore with M. J. Lal Kapur and Feroz Chand as its first President and Secretary, respectively. The Punjab Socialist Party was completely under the Marxist ideas. The Party had set for itself the objective of the establishment of a new economic order in which the labourers would be**

entitled to the full benefit of their labour and there would be no exploitation of any class by another. The immediate aim of the Party, was nationalisation of land and of large-scale industries.

By the end of 1933, inspired by Jawaharlal Nehru, the Socialists in Bombay like, Yusuf Meharally, M.R. Masani, Achyut Patwardhan and Kamla Devi Chattopadhyaya had formed the first Congress Socialist group in Bombay. Thereafter, on 25 February 1934, at the initiative of M.R. Masani, a meeting was held in Bombay, where the Bombay Presidency Congress Socialist Group was formed. Initially, the Party was started without any President, but with two Secretaries, M.R. Masani and Purshottam Das Tricamdas. After some time, the latter was replaced by Yusuf Meherally. The task before the party, as stated by Masani in his letter to Jawaharlal Nehru dated 19 December 1933, was to place before the people and Congressmen, "a programme—that would be socialist in action and objective". He wrote, "The group would do socialist propaganda among rank and file of Congressmen with a view to converting the Congress to an acceptance of Socialism." He added, "We would also carry on propaganda among the workers and peasants and at the same time participating in their day-to-day economic struggle."

Apart from the formation of these Socialist parties in some of the provinces, an All India Working Class Party was also formed at Jabalpur in 1934, by some of the politically conscious trade union leaders, who were under the influence of socialist ideology. The leading lights of the party were Shivrath Banerji, Hariharnath Shastri, Dr. V. Mukherjee, among others. As the name suggests, it was an ultra-Marxist Party and hence its object was the establishment of Socialist Republic by a complete overthrow of the capitalist system.

In U.P., besides the formation of a Socialist group, the Provincial Congress Committee was completely under the influence of the Provincial Congress Committee, passed a resolution in which they expressed the view that political freedom must be accomplished by social and economic freedom of the "exploited masses and the National programme and policy must be based on the transfer of political and economic power to the masses".

In the meantime, side by side with the formation of the Socialist Groups within the Congress, Swarajya Parties were also formed in Bombay and Madras in 1933, and the old Swarajya Party, which was in abeyance since 1930, was revived on an all-India basis. Its revival had a profound influence on both the nationalist and socialist movements of the country. The party was very influential from 1922-1930, but from 1930 onwards, it was more or less a dead party. After the withdrawal of the Civil Disobedience Movement, a move was made by some of the Congressmen, who believed in the Council-entry programme to revive an All-India Swarajya Party. With Gandhiji's blessings, on 31 March 1934, a Conference

of the like-minded Congress leaders was held in Delhi presided over by Bhulabhai Desai. After long deliberations and armed with Gandhiji's support, the Conference passed the following resolution:

"In the opinion of this Conference, the All India Swarajya Party, which has been in abeyance since 1930, should be revived in order to enable Congressmen, who are not offering Satyagraha to undertake through an organisation constructive programme as contemplated in the Poona Settlement."

Dr. M.A. Ansari, along with Bhulabhai Desai, later met Gandhiji, who spontaneously supported the revival of the Swarajya Party and promised to give his all assistance to the Party. Gandhiji also endorsed the decision of the Delhi Conference to take part in the forthcoming elections to the Assembly.

The Swarajists, therefore, called another Conference at Ranchi in the beginning of May 1934, which was largely attended by Congressmen of different ideologies. Among the Socialists, it was also attended by M.R. Masani, who put forward a resolution, which called upon them to undertake "the organisation of peasants and workers for the participation in the struggle against imperialism and Indian vested interest allied with them". The resolution, when put to vote, was defeated by a clear majority of 40 to 26 votes. It was evident from this that the party leadership was still in the old rut and was not prepared to adopt Socialist transformation of the Society.

The Congress Socialists and other radical-minded Congressmen considered the economic policy of the Swarajya Party, as essentially outdated and unprogressive. They believed that the goal of national independence was inadequate unless it was accompanied by a Socialist organisation of the Society. They ridiculed the Swarajists' 'Constructive-programme' and argued that it was the workers and peasants, who should be at the backbone of their struggle. Further expressing diametrically opposite view, the Socialists argued that instead of a "spinning wheel", we should go to the peasants with the "militant force of economic programme".

The younger nationalists bitterly opposed the carrying of the Nationalist struggle along constitutional and parliamentary lines as contemplated by the Swarajists.

Hence, the revival of an All-India Party with such a conservative outlook, ideology and programme, was considered by the Socialists as a challenge to them, and they now felt all the more convinced of the need of the formation of an All-India Socialist Party with a view to counteract such manœuvres of the Right Wingers. As already seen, various socialist groups had emerged in various provinces and now it was a question of their amalgamation into one single All-India Socialist Party.

In the meantime a group of Congressmen with Socialist leanings,



who had attended the Congress Poona Conference, out of utter disgust, met separately for the purpose of forming a Socialist Party. They bitterly criticised the Gandhian policies and programmes and described the Karachi Resolution on Fundamental Rights as 'halting and self-contradictory'. They stressed upon the need for further widening of the Congress base and with the active support of Nehru they wanted to convert the Congress into a Socialist ideology and programme.

While these developments were taking place outside, inside the Nasik Central Prison, where the convicts of the Civil Disobedience Movements were lodged, equally or perhaps more important development took place which proved to be a landmark in the history of Indian Socialist Movement. It was the formulation of the idea to establish Congress Socialist Party. In Nasik prison, there were a mixture of people—the Congress Socialists, the Communists, the Terrorists, and also the young radical-minded Congressmen. Most important among them were: Jaya Prakash Narayan, Asoka Mehta, Achyut Patwardhan, Yusuf Meherally, N.G. Gore, M.R. Masani, S.M. Joshi, M.L. Dantwala, etc. All of them were strong Nationalists as well as Socialists.

These Nasik prisoners prepared the blueprint of the Congress Socialist Party, which was to function within the National Congress. Unlike the leadership of the Communist Party of India, these leaders regarded the Congress as the main nationalist organisation in the country on whose platform the national struggle could be successfully carried on. They, however, at the same time, accepted that the Congress as it existed at that time, was not a mass political organisation in the proper sense of the term, as in their view it had no socio-economic programme for the exploited dumb millions of the country. As Masani remarked later, "The Socialists felt that the two Civil Disobedience Movements failed to achieve their objective because of inadequate mass response, not caused by a lack of ingredients of a revolutionary situation but owing to the restricted nature of the appeal made by the Congress. The call of the Congress was to the individual and not to the masses." Hence, their endeavour was to remove this ideological weakness of the organisation.

In the meantime, on 3 April, 1934, the next move in the direction came when a pamphlet entitled "A Tentative Socialist Programme for India", prepared by Sampurnanand, was circulated among the Congress Socialists. The following excerpt from the pamphlet is worthy of special mention here. It observed:

"It is a strange irony of fate that while there are a large number of socialists, many of them sincere Marxists, in India, there is no All India Socialist Party to organise and focus their activities with a definite programme known to the country. There are, no doubt, very active socialist groups in many provinces, but for various reasons, they have so far not been able to gain for socialism a place, which rightfully belongs

to it. . . . Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru rendered very valuable service by trying to popularise socialism in the eyes of politically minded people."

It went on: "The need for the organisation of a socialist group, an important section of which at least should be affiliated to the Congress, for the present, is being very greatly felt at this time. The capitalists, upper bourgeois are actively engaged in entrenching themselves behind various pseudo-national organisation. It is we alone, who are allowing our case to go by default."

The pamphlet contained a fifteen-point fulfilled Socialist programme to be the basis of the proposed party.

As was expected, soon after his release from jail, Jaya Prakash Narayan hurried to organise the first All-India Congress Socialist Conference at Patna on 17 May 1934. The Conference was significant as it met just a day before the All India Congress Committee was going to meet to formally call off the Civil Disobedience Movement and start constitutional and parliamentary activities. According to Yusuf Meherally, "It was in the fitness of things that the Left Wing also should organise its forces to prevent this drift to the Right."

The Conference met under the Presidentship of Acharya Narendra Deva, a celebrated Marxist theoretician. It was attended by over one hundred Socialist delegates from different parts of the country. All the prominent leaders attending the Conference expressed their concern at the revival of the Swarajya Party. Acharya Narendra Deva, in his address, said : "Socialism has come to stay in India. But most of us in the Congress today are mere intellectual socialists . . . We should avoid dogmatism and secretarianism. We must take out stand on scientific socialism or social reformism." Explaining the reasons for convening the conference, he remarked that it was convened, "to prevent an outright drift to constitutionalism and to put a more dynamic programme before the country." He continued : "The whole movement stands in danger of being deflected from its revolutionary path and if the Congress is again made to travel the old barren path of constitutionalism and reformism, it will turn itself into a morass from which it will not be possible for it to extricate itself."

The Conference decided to organise soon another All India Conference at which an All India Congress Socialist Party was to be formally inaugurated. A committee was appointed to draft a constitutional and programme for the Congress Socialist Party. The members of the drafting Committee were :

1. Acharya Narendra Deva as its President
2. Jaya Prakash Narayan as Secretary
3. C.C. Banerji
4. Faridul Huq

By other resolution, it was resolved that "Jaya Prakash Narayan be appointed the organising Secretary of the All-India Congress Socialist Conference to organise provincial congress socialist groups, where they do not exist on the basis of the programme adopted by the drafting committee and arrange for an All-India Conference to form an All-India Congress Socialist Party, immediately and prior to the next session of the Indian National Congress."

The drafting committee met twice, first at Patna and later at Benaras and drew the party's constitution and programme. According to the decision of the Patna Conference, Jaya Prakash Narayan, who was the organising Secretary, was entrusted with the task of organising provincial Congress Socialist units. He worked very hard, strenuously travelling from place to place, gathering together all leftist elements, setting up Congress Socialist groups everywhere. As a result of his relentless and untiring efforts rapid strides were made on organisational plane, so much so that at the time of Patna Conference, there were only three provincial parties and by the time the Bombay Conference took place, their number swelled to thirteen. This in itself was a big success as these provincial parties were to federate to form an All-India Congress Socialist Party.

Shortly after the first session of the All-India Congress Socialist Party was held in Bombay on 21 and 22 October 1934, where the party was formally inaugurated. The first open session of the party was attended by 150 delegates coming from all parts of the country. All the 13 provincial Congress Socialist Parties, from these provinces, namely, U.P., Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra, Bengal, Kerala, Bihar, Delhi, Berar, C.P., Utkal and Ajmer were amalgamated to form an All-India party. It was presided over by Sampurnanand, with Purshottamdas Tricamdas as the Chairman of the Reception Committee. All the prominent Socialist leaders took active part in it. The average age of C.S.P. leadership at the time of the Bombay Conference was only 30 years. Thus, youthfulness and exuberance characterised the leadership of the party.

In his welcome address, Purshottamdas Tricamdas described the Congress Socialists assembled there as those representing the elements, who after having fought for nearly three years, had fully realised both ideological and organisational weakness of the Indian National Congress, and who earnestly wanted to remove those weaknesses and limitations. He further said that in their analysis it were the weaknesses and the limitations of the National Congress, which were hampering the successful march of the national movement. He remarked: "Mistakes are made . . . even by the wisest and most foresighted, but wisdom lies in admitting and taking lessons from them. He further remarked that : "an ostrich-like policy of shutting your eyes and pretending that all is well have never done good to any body." He warned the participants against placing any faith in the bonafides of the imperialist Government. Sur-

prisingly enough, there was no presidential address from Sampurnanand and the Party adopted the revised constitution and programme.

The party was named as All-India Congress Socialist Party. The word 'Congress' which was prefixed to 'Socialist' signified the organic relationship which the party leadership felt the party should have with the national movement. In the aims and objects, the party was quite similar to that of the British Labour Party.

Regarding the membership of the party, it was provided that, "The party shall consist of the members of the Indian National Congress, who are members of a Provincial Congress Socialist Party, provided that they are not members : (1) of any communal organisation, (2) or of any other political organisation, whose objects and programmes are in the opinion of the party inconsistent with its own. It meant that no one could become a member of the Congress Socialist Party without first becoming a member of the Indian National Congress.

The Constitution provided for an affiliated Congress Socialist Party in every province.

It was provided that the "Executive Committee of the party shall be elected in the annual Conference and shall consist of one General Secretary, three Joint Secretaries and eleven other members."

The Party's programme was classified under three main heads : (i) Objective, (ii) Plan of Action, (iii) Immediate Demands. Under the first, it was further clarified what the Congress Socialist Party meant by the term complete independence. It said : "Independence must mean the establishment of an Independent State, where, in all, power is transferred to the producing masses, and much objective involves refusal to compromise at any stage with the British Imperialism." By another resolution, the Conference further elaborated what the term 'Swaraj' implied for the masses. It stated :

"The Conference is of the opinion that to enable the masses to appreciate what 'Swaraj' as conceived by the Congress will mean to them, it is desirable to state the position of the Congress in a manner easily understandable by them. In order to end the exploitation of the masses, political freedom must include the real economic freedom of the starving millions. The Congress, therefore, declares, that the future Constitution of the Indian States shall be based on the following fundamental principles :

1. Transfer of all power to the producing masses.
2. Development of the economic life of the country to be planned and controlled by the State.
3. The Socialisation of key and principal industries (e.g. steel, cotton, jute, railways, shipping, plantations, mines, insurance and public utilities, with a view to the progressive socialisation

- of the instruments of production, distribution and exchange.
- 4. State monopoly of foreign trade.
- 5. Organisation of cooperatives for production, distribution and credit in the unsocialised sector of the economic life.
- 6. Elimination of princes and landlords and other classes of exploiters, without compensation.
- 7. Redistribution of land to the peasants.
- 8. The State to encourage and control cooperative and collective farming.
- 9. Liquidation of debts owned by peasants and workers.
- 10. Recognition of the right to work or maintenance by the State.
- 11. To everyone, according to his means, is to be the basis ultimately of distribution on economic grounds.
- 12. Adult franchise, which shall be on a functional basis.
- 13. The State shall neither support nor discriminate between religions nor recognise any distinction based on caste or community.
- 14. The State shall not discriminate between the sexes.
- 15. Repudiation of the so-called public debt of India.

The plan of action called the party :

- 1 To work within the Indian National Congress with a view to secure its acceptance of the objects and programmes of the party.
- 2. To organise peasants and labour Unions.
- 3. To organise and participate in youth leagues, women's organisations, voluntary organisations, etc. for the purpose of getting their support to the programme of the Party.
- 4. To actively oppose all Imperialist wars and the utilisation of such other crisis for the intensification of the national struggle.
- 5. To refuse to enter at any stage into negotiations on Constitutional issues with the British Government.

In the immediate demands, there were about thirty items, which included political and economic demands and labour and peasants' demands, but there was nothing revolutionary about them. Thus, at its very first session, the party passed such wide-ranging resolutions which, as would be seen later, made their profound impact on the resolutions passed by the subsequent session of the Congress and the policies adopted by the future Congress Governments.

The Bombay A.I.C.S.P. Conference passed another important resolution, which stated as under :

"This Conference is of the opinion, that no member of C.S.P. should

become an office bearer in any Congress organisation, except where the organisation concerned has resolved to carry out the party's immediate programme of work as indicated in the draft programme of the All India Congress Socialist Party and the Executive Committee of the provincial Congress Socialist Party gives previous permission to accept office, and calls upon those Congress socialists, who are office bearers in any organisation, whose programme does not conform to that of the C.S.P., to give up their office."

An Executive Committee with Jaya Prakash Narayan as the General Secretary and M.R. Masani, Mohan Lal Gautam, N. G. Goray and E.M.S Namboodiripad as Joint Secretaries; the following were its members, namely : Acharya Narendra Deva, Sampurnanand, Kamla Devi Chattopadhyaya, Purshottamdas Tricumdas, P.Y. Deshpande, Ram Manohar Lohia, S.M. Joshi, Amarendra Prasad Mitra, Charles Mescarnes, Naba Krishna Chaudhury and Achyut Patwardhan.

### **Brief Biographical Sketch of the C S P Stalwarts**

As some of the leaders of the party played a very important role in shaping party's ideology, programme and its subsequent evolution, it would be worthwhile to study the social origin and the political philosophy of some of the stalwarts of the party.

### **Jaya Prakash Narayan**

The most outstanding of them was undoubtedly Jaya Prakash Narayan. He was one of the founding fathers of the party and for many years remained its General Secretary. He was the most popular leader of the party and at that time a Marxist in the true sense of the term. He was born in Sitabdiara village of Bihar, in a poor peasant family and, by family background he was well suited to come under the influence of Marxian ideas. His meteoric rise into eminence from such a low social and economic level is really exemplary. In a very short span of his political career, he shot up into political prominence as the youngest front-rank leader of the national movement. Jaya Prakash Narayan began his educational career with natural sciences, but later changed to Economics and Sociology. Sometime in October 1922, Jaya Prakash Narayan went to the United States for getting higher education and it was there that he was first exposed to the Marxian precepts of class struggle. When he reached the University of California, he found that the University's session had not commenced. Hence he decided to work in fruit farms during spare time so as to earn his livelihood. During the course of his stay in America, he did all types of work. He worked very hard even on Sundays and other holidays. He was astonished to see "the prevalence of great wealth and grinding poverty side by side." Subsequently, when he came into contact with the American Communists, he

joined the American Communist Party. In America he also made a close study of the trade union movement. On his way back to India in 1929, while in London, he was disillusioned to know that the Indian Communist Party was just an agent of Moscow. Nevertheless, he started devouring the classics of Marxism and before long, but not without a powerful mental struggle, he became a confirmed Socialist. When he returned to India, Jawaharlal Nehru placed him in charge of the Labour Research Department of the Indian National Congress. At that time Jaya Prakash Narayan was a strong critic of Gandhism. He joined the Indian National Congress, but remained a thorough Marxist. For a considerable period, he believed in Marxian doctrines of class struggle and in revolutionary methods for achieving independence and socialist objectives. He elaborated his political ideology in a scholarly work, "Why Socialism?" which contained the political philosophy of the Congress Socialist Party. Like many other Indian Socialists, he was profoundly influenced by the Russian Revolution and its many sided achievements. Gandhiji wrote about him, "...It may be said that what he does not know on Western Socialism nobody else in India does."

Like A.O. Hume in 1885, Jaya Prakash Narayan in 1934, channelised the rising discontentment among the younger Congress leaders through the "safety valve" of the Congress Socialist Party, a group formed within the Indian National Congress. It was a great contribution of Jaya Prakash Narayan that he diverted the young radical nationalists from their bizarre revolutionary, destructive path to a constructive socialist opposition to both Congress Right Wing and Imperialist Government.

### **Acharya Narendra Deva**

Acharya Narendra Deva, though not a member of the original 'Nasik Group' of socialists was the grey eminence of the Socialist Party for more than two decades. It has been well said by a contemporary scholar about Narendra Deva that 'his erudition overwhelms you, his sweet reasonableness disarms you, his inexhaustible patience imprisons you, the chains of his silken logic captivates you almost without your being aware of it'. Narendra Deva was born in 1890 in U.P., his father, Babu Baldev Prasad, was a famous lawyer. His father wanted him to study law and follow his footsteps, but Narendra Deva from his very early age was tempted towards Indian history, culture and archaeology and had actually joined the Queen's College of Epigraphy at Benaras. However, as per his father's wishes, he did join Law. But soon he jumped into active politics in his home town Fyzabad and joined Home Rule League and attended various sessions of the Indian National Congress. Narendra Deva in his very young age admired National leaders like Ranade, Romesh Chandra Dutt, Lokmanya Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal. These stalwarts made deep impressions on him with their "Left" "Radi-

cal" ideology. Among the Western thinkers, who influenced him were Sydney Webb, Mazzini, Bluntschelli and Karl Marx. He also came under the influence of Russian Revolution and soon became well conversant with Marxian theories, Marxian dialectics and the materialistic interpretations of history. He was one of the great Marxist theoretician of the Socialist Party and was considered as one of the outstanding exponents of Marxism in India. He, along with Jaya Prakash Narayan, represented Marxian trend and tendency of the Party.

#### **Sampurnanand**

Another luminary of the Party was Sampurnanand, who had written as early as 1930, a booklet : "When we were in power", which contained a comprehensive programme of the Socialist organisation of society. He was also one of the top-ranking leaders of the Party, who presided over the first Bombay Conference of the Party. In 1936, he wrote another book, called "Samajvad", which abounds in Marxist ideas and formulations. In his work, he called himself a Scientific Socialist and a fullfledged Marxist. Thus, he also symbolised the Marxian trends of the party along with Jaya Prakash Narayan and Acharya Narendra Deva.

#### **Yusuf Meherally**

Yusuf Meherally was another important leader of the Congress Socialist Party. He was born in 1903. His father, Jaffer Meherally, was a wealthy businessman of Bombay, while his great-grand-father had founded the first Indian Textile Mill. Yusuf Meherally was brought up in a rich aristocratic family. The Meherally family was traditionally pro-British. When in 1930, Meherally was arrested and sent to jail for participating in the Civil Disobedience Movement; his family members resented for his being a "law breaker". Meherally never occupied any office but he was also among the top leaders of the party. He closely studied the history of revolutions and was deeply influenced by the writings of Mazzini and Garibaldi, and by the 'Sinn Fein Movement' of Ireland. He earnestly tried to radicalise the National Movement. He was the founder of the Bombay Provincial Youth League, which took very prominent part in the demonstrations against the Simon Commission. It was he who on 3 February 1928, gave the slogan "Go Back Simon", which was echoed in every nook and corner of India. He became very popular in the country and won the appreciation of even Mahatma Gandhi.

He was the moving spirit behind youth activities in his province and presided over a number of youth conferences. Meherally was Editor of an important Weekly called *Vanguard*, which was known for its bold nationalist publications,



### **Achyut Patwardhan**

Achyut Patwardhan, who is still alive, was a frontranking Congress Socialist leader. He was also a prisoner in the Nasik Central Prison and played an important role in the formation and subsequent development of the Party. Born in 1905, Patwardhan is a son of a wealthy theosophist father and was educated at Benaras Hindu University. He is more a Gandhian than a Socialist. He believed in "democratic socialism", and was influenced by the Gandhian concept of decentralisation and non-violent revolution. Patwardhan represents 'Gandhian strand in Indian Socialism as against Marxian Socialism. He has the distinction of becoming a member of the Congress Working Committee at the young age of 31 years in 1936.

### **Ram Manohar Lohia**

Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia was the stormy petrel and highly controversial figure of the Indian politics as well as of the socialist movement. He was born on 23 March, 1910, in a Vaish family at Akbarpur in Faizabad District of UP. Lohia's father, Hiralal, was a Nationalist and was under the influence of Gandhiji. It is said that when Lohia was hardly ten years old, his father took him to Gandhiji for his blessings and from very early age he came under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi and work Khadi. In 1928, he attended a Youth Conference and came in close contact with Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose. For higher studies he went to the Berlin University from where he obtained Doctoral Degree in 1932 for his excellent thesis on "Satyagraha". He came in close contact with Dr. Schumacher, Brailsford and other social Democratic leaders. Like Patwardhan, he was not under the complete spell of Marxism and represented along with him Gandhian strand in the Congress Socialist Party. In 1936, he was placed by Nehru in charge of the newly created Foreign Affairs Department of the All India Congress Committee. He remained on the Secretaryship of the Foreign Affairs Department till September 1, 1938, when he resigned in the wake of the Congress decision debarring a member of the Congress Working Committee from occupying any office in other organisation. Nevertheless until 1948, when the Socialists severed their connection with the Congress, he alongwith Nehru played an important role in shaping the emerging foreign policy of the Congress and thereby of the post-independent India. Lohia was the founder of the Journal, *Congress Socialist*, first published from Calcutta and edited by him and later from Bombay. The *Congress Socialist* became the official organ of the Congress Socialist Party.

### **Asoka Mehta**

Another Socialist leader, who needs special mention is Asoka Mehta.

He was born in 1911 at Ahmedabad. Asoka Mehta's father was an outstanding literary figure in Gujarat. His father played an important role in founding many cultural and educational institutions, including the famous Gujarati Sahitya Parishad. Unfortunately, when Asoka was only eight years old, he lost his parents. He had his early education at Sholapur and for higher studies he moved to Bombay. It was here that he got attracted towards the rising wave of national movement and also trade union movement. It is said once Asoka, along with his other friends, stopped the car of Mohammed Ali Jinnah, who was wearing his usual suit and tie and asked him, "Why don't you discard this foreign dress and wear khaddar?"

In 1932, he was arrested and imprisoned for a term of 2½ years for participating in the Civil Disobedience Movement. Asoka Mehta was also a member of the 'Nasik Group of prisoners' who took an active part in preparing the blueprint of the Congress Socialist Party. For a number of years he was the Editor of the Journal *Congress Socialist*. He took charge of the Journal after its office was shifted from Calcutta to Bombay and continued editing it till 1939, when it was finally closed down. Ashoka Mehta is a good example of Fabian or Social Democratic strand in Indian Socialism. He, too, has not been a dogmatic Marxist and was against pure importation of the Russian methods and techniques of revolution. Asoka Mehta took active interest in the trade union movement and organised unions in General Motors Ltd., Richardson and Cruddas and the Times of India. He also played a very important role in organising and strengthening the 'Hind Mazdoor'. It was, in fact, largely due to him that the Hind Mazdoor Sabha later developed into a powerful and a genuine trade union organisation in the country. Asoka Mehta was a voracious reader, a brilliant debator and a thinker. He has got several outstanding publications to his credit. In 1977, when Janata Party was formed, he also became a member of it and was associated with it till the time of his death in 1984.

### **M. R. Masani**

Then we come to M.R. Masani, whose career has spanned the gamut of political ideologies from Left to the extreme Right. Masani had his educational career at the famous London School of Economics. But, unlike his contemporaries, he was not much influenced by Harold Laski, who was at that time one of the pace setters of the London School of Economics. In his student days, he had been profoundly influenced by the Fabians and other theoreticians of the British Labour Party. From the very beginning, he was opposed to the Communists for their taking guidelines from Moscow and having extra-territorial loyalty. Masani, who was a very important leader of the Congress Socialist Party, later turned to Gandhism and still later joined the Right Wing Swatantra

Party, which he represented in Parliament for a number of years. He was also a member of the Constituent Assembly and had been a Mayor of Bombay.

### **Kamla Devi Chattopadhyaya**

Lastly, we come to Mrs. Kamla Devi Chattopadhyaya who among front-ranking Congress Socialist leaders, played an important role in making the Congress Socialist Party an effective instrument of national struggle. She was born in a well-to-do Saraswat family of Mangalore in 1903. Her father was a civil servant, for whom, like the typical bureaucrats of those days, national movement was an anathema. But, Kamala Devi was inspired by her grand-mother, who was a devout scholar of Sanskrit and Indology. In 1910, when Kamla Devi was just seven years old, her father died. She inherited from her mother strong qualities of head and heart. In her youth, she was extremely charming and had a passion for art and literature. She married twice but her married life was not so happy. When Kamla was hardly thirty years of age, she found herself in the thick of the national struggle for freedom. In 1927, she was elected to the All India Congress Committee (AICC) and also became an important member of the Hindustan Seva Dal.

She played a very important role in the 1930 Civil Disobedience Movement (Salt Satyagraha) and, like Aruna Asaf Ali in 1942 Movement, became quite popular in the country. She had the distinction of being the first woman to be arrested in that movement. She also took prominent part in organising the women's section of the Congress Volunteer Corps. By this time she had come under the spell of Socialist ideology and when the Congress Socialist Party was formed in 1934, she at once joined it and started taking important role in the activities of the party. She had the distinction of presiding over the most important Meerut Conference of the CSP. In the deliberations of the AICC, she, on behalf of the Congress Socialists, took prominent part in influencing the parent body, with the party's radical ideology and programme. In 1942, she was arrested for participating in the 'Quit India' Movement. In 1946, she was made a member of the Congress Working Committee by Jawaharlal Nehru. She also played an important role in several voluntary social and cultural organisations, especially for women welfare. She worked tirelessly for the political, socio-economic emancipation of the masses. Indeed, her life is a story of sacrifice, suffering and hard work.

### **The Congress Socialist Party and the United Socialist Front**

Right from its birth, the Congress Socialist Party, as an important left wing group in the country, strived hard to establish an United Socialist Party of India, by amalgamating within its fold all left wing elements. At that time, there were two other important left Parties, in

the country, the Communist Party of India, which exercised considerable influence on the left wing politics of the time and the other was the group of the followers of M.N. Roy, known as Royists. There were three leftist parties, which had formed an United Left Front from 1939-40, for vigorously pursuing an Anti-Imperialist struggle and, as well as, a counterweight against Congress Right dominance in the Congress. For a clear understanding of the role, the CSP played in furthering its objectives, the study of Party's relations with the Communists and Royists becomes inevitable. Hence we shall discuss at some length the role played by the Party in the successful working of the fronts.

After the formation of the Congress Socialist Party, as a ginger group within the Indian National Congress, International Communist policy took a sudden change as a result of the new strategy of the United Front announced by the seventh world Congress of the Communist International at its meeting in Moscow from 25 July to 20 August, 1935. The former, strictly sectarian policy, formulated by the sixth Comintern in 1928 had crippled and isolated the Communist Parties and their movements in most of the countries of the world. This ultra leftist line of Sixth Communist International, had brought about the total isolation and decadence of the Communist Party of India from the mainstream of the National Movement. In India, this accounts for a revision in their policy. However, in the West the concept of "United Front" was originated by the Communists in order to meet the challenge posed by the growing menace of Fascism and Nazism.

The full implications of this changed Comintern policy were not fully grasped by the Indian Communists until the two comrades of the Communist Party of Great Britain, namely, R. Palme Dutt and Ben Bradley, presented their thesis, under the caption "The Anti-Imperialist People's Front in India". The thesis declared that "The National Congress has, undoubtedly achieved a gigantic task in uniting wide forces of the Indian people for the national struggle. . . The National Congress can play a great and a foremost part in the work of realising the Anti-Imperialist People's front." It called for the unity of all left wing forces and stated that the rallying of the leftist forces in the Congress was to be attained only through the platform of the Congress Socialist Party.

Precisely, the thesis called upon the Indian Communists to come closer to the Congress Socialist Party for an onslaught on the Congress Right Wing leadership as well as the imperialists.

The Congress Socialist Party which was already sincerely looking forward at the prospect of forming an United Socialist Front, became very jubilant at the new orientation in the Communist policy. The Party had already acquired the friendship of Royists (the followers of M.N. Roy). The Party leadership now became quite confident of thrash-

ing out a real United Socialist Party of India, comprising all leftist forces—Communists, Royists, Trade Unionists. As such, sometime in January 1936, at its second annual conference at Meerut, the National Executive of the CSP by a unanimous resolution opened the Party's door for individual communists. It was an unilateral decision taken by the Congress Socialist Party on the advice of Jaya Prakash Narayan.

According to Jaya Prakash Narayan, the Meerut Conference of the CSP, anticipating a change in Communist tactics in view of the call given by the Comintern for the United Front, unconditionally stretched its hand of friendship and cooperation. In his account of the period, he writes that 'it was based on the belief that important elements in the Communist Party were in favour of forming such a Front.'

However, in response to the call given by the National Executive of the CSP for forming an United Front the Communists responded only by sending its sole representative to the Meerut Conference of the CSP to make a detailed study on this "left maneuver of the Bourgeoisie," as they termed it. But gradually, the Communists under the able, astute and energetic leadership of P.C. Joshi started applying for the membership of the Congress Socialist Party. But the real amalgamation of the two left parties was achieved at the time of the Lucknow Session of the Indian National Congress in April 1936 when the "Lucknow Agreement" was signed by which both parties recognised each other as bonafide socialist parties and declared that they would cooperate with each other with a view to an eventual merger.

Now the decks were thus cleared and the Communists, whose party was still outlawed, started entering not only into the Congress Socialist Party, but through it in the Indian National Congress and, also into the All-India Kisan Sabha. It was hoped that as a result of United Socialist Front between the two, the position of the Communist would be strengthened in the national and peasant movements, in which the Socialists had already gained a predominant position and in their turn the Socialists would improve their position in the Trade Union Movement. Nevertheless, as the subsequent events unfolded themselves, it proved to be a nauseating and very bad bargain for the Socialists.

In less than six months of Lucknow Agreement, the disturbing reports started coming to the National Executive of the Congress Socialist Party, regarding communists' practical activities, specially in Bombay, Calcutta, Kanpur and Andhra. Outside the party forum also there were frequent complaints of the communists' capture tactics in the labour and peasant movements and youth organisations. It was reported that the Communists were claiming that they would not allow any other party to entrench itself in the Trade Union Movement. It was also reported that the members of the CPI were obstructing joint work in the Labour Movement. The National Executive of the CSP which met in April 1937,

cautioned the local units of the Party to remain vigilant against such communist manœuvres. It also wanted the communist members against such fraction work.

But these warnings were practically of no use as the Communists were already controlling some of the provincial organisations of the CSP. In the South, the party affairs are completely in the hands of E.M.S. Namboodiripad who was joint Secretary of the AICSP and leader of the Kerala provincial organisation. As the chief mentor in the South, he had placed the Madras Unit of the CSP in the hands of P. Ramamurti and P. Jeevandam, the well-known communist leaders. Likewise P. Sundarayya was put in the charge of the Andhra Unit of the Congress Socialist Party. Thus in the South, the provincial organisations of the CSP were turned into the branches of the CPI. There were other members of the Communist Party, who were given important position in the CSP. Sajjad Zaheer was made Joint Secretary of the AICSP and a member of the AICC ; Z.A. Ahmad and K. Ashraf were members of the CSP Executive Committee and were also appointed by Jawaharlal Nehru to the important positions in the AICC. Besides this, the Communists through their sectarian tactics captured the leadership of the CSP units in the labour centres of the North.

Thus their association with the CSP served as a boon to them. It was through the Congress Socialist Party's strategic position and vote that the Communists were elected to the important posts in Provincial Congress Committees and even to the All India Congress Committee. The Communists became very active in the peasant movement also during this period. A number of Communist Party leaders, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, Sajjad Zaheer, Dr. Z.A. Ahmad, A.K. Gopalan, Dr. K.M. Ashraf, P. Ramamurti, P. Sundarayya and P. Jeevandam occupied important positions in the All India Kisan Sabha. It was the membership of the CSP that gave Communists a chance, an opportunity to entrench themselves in the mainstream of the national activities. Undoubtedly, it was the newly acquired label of "Congressmen" that gave the Communists, whose party was still tainted with illegality, an unprecedented respectability and influence.

According to the Socialist Party's documents, it was Communist tactics of factionalism and disruption within the party that the process "of organic socialist unity turned into a straight power tussle for the control of the party and other mass organisation of Anti-imperialist struggle. However, uneasy clam continued for some time amidst charges and counter-charges. The Communists alleged through their party organ against a "hearsay hunt" in the CSP. They complained that anyone who felt inclined to criticise the charged politics of National Executive was termed as "disrupter" and "disloyal" in the party. And, with this allegation the Communists were first to express that "United Action" is

practically impossible while the National Executive of the CSP was reluctant to do anything that might hamper the chances of Socialist Unity. The Bombay provincial CSP under the leadership of Masani and Meherally was the first to bell the cat, after showing great tolerance, the Comrade Soli Batliwala for his consistent disloyalty to the party. The Bombay CSP expelled him from the party. His record in the party was considered "chequered one" and detrimental to the interest of the party. Another known Communist member, who was suspended from the party, was K.T. Chandy.

Thus by August 1937, the relations between the two left parties began deteriorating and the CSP National Executive at its meeting held at Patna from 7 to 9 August 1937, was constrained to give another look at their profession of Socialist Unity. At this meeting a secret Communist Party document, which came in the hands of M.R. Masani was read. The exposure of the document, according to Jaya Prakash Narayan 'caused a painful shock and great indignation' to the socialists. The document clearly stated that the Congress Socialist Party was not a Socialist Party and the Communist Party was the only genuine Socialist Party. The document was a clear indication that the Communists wanted to capture and use the Congress Socialist Party as a legal forum for infiltration into the Congress. According to Jaya Prakash Narayan, the General Secretary of the Party, the document knocked the whole basis of the "Lucknow Agreement," in which both parties recognised each other as the sister Marxist/Socialist parties, which would cooperate to merge themselves ultimately into one single Socialist Party. The exposure of the several Communist documents completely belied their profession of unity and shook up the united front agreement.

The CSP leadership sharply reacted to the Communist charge and emphatically stated that the CSP is not a platform of left parties, it is a political party with its distinct ideology, programme of work and discipline, strives for Socialist unity. There were at that time four communist members of the National Executive of the CSP, who denying their communist allegiance "shammed shock and indignation at the discovery" of such a statement. But it was of no avail. The National Executive of the party took a very serious view of this development and unanimously passed a resolution stating that in future, no member of the Communist party would be allowed to enter into the CSP. However, no decision was taken to expel those Communists, who were already there. Thus a big jolt was administered to the growing United Socialist Front.

However, the above decision of the Executive was considered too lenient and unsatisfying by a group of CSP leadership. In fact, this soft pedalling of the Party leadership led by Jaya Prakash Narayan was owing to the Party's eagerness "to avoid doing anything to what might make the chances of unity more difficult. Jaya Prakash Narayan still continued to believe in the prospect of Socialist unity. It was based on his prepos-

rous belief that the Communists might rectify their mistakes and enter into genuine socialist front.

Thus by the end of 1937, the first ever Socialist Unity experiment of the CSP became very shaky and almost an impossibility. The Royist proposition to transform the CSP into a platform of "Left Unity" and reflection of the same view by the Communists tore into pieces the whole CSP efforts of forming an United Socialist Front.

After this, events developed as was expected and the relations between the two worsened day by day. While the Communists complained that by refusing admission to their partymen the Socialists who talked, 'Socialist Unity', the CSP leadership described the Communist tactics as "criminal", and felt convinced that there was no other alternative but to remove them from the party with bag and baggage.

Therefore, just prior to the Lahore session of the Congress Socialist Party, in a tactical move, aimed at appeasing the Socialist leadership, the Communists published a statement in the first issue of their Party organ, *National Front*, which asked the Communists to 'alter their attitude' and start working seriously inside the Congress. It called for the unity of entire left to develop the independent class organisation of workers and peasants with a view to form a United Socialist Party. Then coming to the Lahore session of the CSP, it stated that the CSP, must emerge at Lahore as a powerful United Socialist Party, welcoming into its ranks all genuine active anti-imperialists, all genuine Socialists and Communists.

### **The Lahore Conference of the CSP**

Then came the Lahore Conference of the All-India Congress Socialist Party, presided over by Minoo Masani in April 1939. At the Conference the Communists brought an amazing note before the Central Executive of the Party. The note reaffirmed the Communist allegiance to the "Lucknow Agreement." It stated that the "Communist Party considered the CSP to be a true revolutionary Marxist Party and that the United Socialist Front could be brought about only by the unity of the two parties." However, the Socialist hardliners dismissed this CPI overtures as fraudulent and patently insincere.

The Lahore Conference rejected the misleading slogan of "All Socialists in side the CSP" and reaffirmed its resolve to remain homogenous and disciplined party. It endorsed the Patna executive decision to ban the admission of the members of the "Red Groups" to the Party.

At the Conference the Communists made another bid to capture the Party organisation by presenting their own list for the composition of the new Executive Committee. Their list was in contradiction to the list, which Jaya Prakash Narayan had himself prepared. Jaya Prakash Narayan's list consisted of the old Executive members with some minor



changes. It gave Communists one-third of the seats with two out of four posts of joint Secretaryship. In the Communist list, except Jaya Prakash Narayan, all other members of old Executive were replaced by Communist members. The boldness and audacity of the move astounded many, writes Masani. Nevertheless, official list prepared by Jaya Prakash Narayan was approved. Thus, while the Communists talked from the top of their voices for unity, an open attempt was made to capture the Party apparatus.

The New National Executive of the Party comprised Jaya Prakash Narayan as General Secretary; M.R. Masani, Dinkar Mehta, E.M.S. Namboodiripad and Yusuf Meherally, as its Joint Secretaries. Its other members were: Nerendra Deva, Kamla Devi Chattopadhyaya, Achyut Patwardhan, Ram Manohar Lohia, Asoka Mehta, Munshi Ahmad Din, Sibnath Banerji, Gunda Mazumdar, Satyavati Devi, Sajjad Zaheer, Seth Damodar Swarup.

After the Lahore Conference, the distrust and mutual suspicion grew with still faster speed and there were allegations and counter-allegations day out. Thereafter, towards the end of 1938, another secret Communist Party circular entitled "plan of Work" dated 9 May, 1938, came into the hands of Minoo Masani. It was meant for the Communist members only and dealt at length on the tactics to be followed by them for controlling the CSP. Masani published it in the month of September 1938 under the headline "Communist Plot against the CSP." The Communist circular noted with satisfaction their success capturing the Party organisation in the various provinces and in converting a number of persons to their sect. It entrusted the communists with the specific task in other provinces also.

Now the pretension of unity was completely exploded. It became absolutely clear to the CSP rank and file that while subscribing to Party's concept of socialist unity, they were simply using it as a recruiting ground for the membership of their own Party, whose separate identity they wanted to preserve. Undoubtedly, it was now high time for the CSP National Executive to stop this "policy of drift," which was daily delivering the party into the hands of the Communist Party. A few years later Jaya Prakash Narayan, who was the author of this policy, himself regretted this indecisiveness of the National Executive. He wrote:

"Now it was no longer the ideal of hope of unity that decided the Executive. It was reluctance to face an unpleasant task. Those were dark days for the party, when lack of decision created a good deal of confusion and weakness. The enemies of the Party did not fail to profit fully by it."

Even on the occasion of 1939 Tripuri Congress crisis, in spite of best efforts of Jaya Prakash Narayan the Communists refused to toe the line of CSP and adopted an independent policy. But the CSP high command

still lacked the courage to purge the Party of all bad elements. At the meeting of party's National Executive at Calcutta, Patwardhan and Ram Manohar Lohia in May 1939, and four leaders, namely, Minoo Masani, Asoka Mehta, Achyut tendered their resignations. They resigned in protest against the policy by which their party was being swallowed up. Their resignations were welcomed by the Communists and their fellow-travellers.

In December 1939, by the efforts of Subhas Chandra Bose a conference consisting of all leftists, Communists, Socialists and Forward Blockists was convened at Lucknow. At the end of the Conference, a seven-point "Common Programme of Work" was adopted to conduct the anti-war activities by the different left groups. But, surprisingly enough, within one month of their "Lucknow Agreement", the Communist Party (according to CSP document) once again declared their war against CSP. Socialists also retaliated through articles and pamphlets denouncing the Communists for their anti-congress and anti-socialist prejudices. "With that we were back in the primitive days of 1934, a lovely dream from which there is sure to be a rather rude awakening" wrote Jaya Prakash Narayan.

At long last in 1940, at the time of Ramgarh Congress Session, the National Executive of the Party, decided to drop its four Communist members and expelled all those who were either members of the Communist Party or its followers. Thus ended a tragic chapter in the history of the Indian Socialist Movement.

For the Communists the United Front was a big success. By 1939, they had gained substantially from their infiltration into the Congress Socialist Party and through it into the Indian National Congress itself. The Communists whose party was outlawed at that time not only made access into the Indian National Congress, but also, through the patronage given by Jawaharlal Nehru, occupied very high position there. However, for the CSP, it proved to be a disastrous experience. The policy of collaboration with the Communists and its undue long continuance just ruined the party. It was, in fact, a measure of their self-destruction. As noted earlier, the Communists by their strict sectarian tactics were able to take away with them a big chunk of party membership in Andhra, Kerala, Madras, Bengal and a large following in the Punjab and elsewhere. With the split, the party lost control over the substantial section of the AICSP and AISF. But their biggest loss was in Trade Unions, where the Communists maneuvered to get complete control of the All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC). From Socialists' point of view, it was the CSP leadership's grievous mistake to have admitted Communists in the CSP and the party had to pay heavy penalty for it.

### **Royists and the Front**

The Royists had welcomed formation of CSP and many of its members had participated in the Patna Conference of the party. The party leadership later responded by inviting them to join CSP. It was hoped by the party leadership that the Royists would eventually merge with the party. In a couple of month's time, the Royists entered the CSP in large numbers, and naturally a hope was enlivened that atleast two of the three major Marxist parties would unite. The Socialist made every effort to "accelerate this process of absorption".

However, as the subsequent account will show, all attempts proved futile.

In the beginning, when the Royists joined the CSP, they were quite in harmony with the basic principles, policies and programmes of the party. But soon after his release from prison, Roy in some of his public utterances struck a different note altogether and their differences began to appear on the surface. These differences took a definite shape and appeared fundamental because of Roy's unfriendly approach towards the CSP. As a matter of fact, his activities amounted to disruption of the United Front and the sabotage of the task of building it up. At the outset, Roy expressed his total disagreement with the formation of a Socialist Party inside the National Congress. Royists' point of view was, that the CSP should "not at all be developed as a Socialist Party but as the left wing of the Congress". Royists went to the extent of saying that "the Congress Socialist Party should indeed be liquidated". In the words of Roy himself, "The Congress Socialist Party is either an organisation of the left wing of the Congress or a genuine Marxist Socialist Party. If it is the former, then it can not be a real Socialist Party. If it is the latter, then it must adopt the plan of action and the organisational form of a communist Party."

The main argument behind Roy's criticism was that CSP by talking Socialism inside the Congress, was doing more harm than good to anti-imperialist struggle, because the Congress as a multi-class organisation of the national struggle could not be expected to adopt socialism as its objective. According to Roy, the plan to convert the Congress as such to socialism was utopian. He was totally against the development of a left wing party inside the Congress. He contended that such a party should be formed outside the mother party, the Congress with the nomenclature of a Communist Party. Nevertheless, in spite of this formal accusation of the CSP by their god-father, the Royist continued to remain in the CSP. But the relations between two left parties started getting cooler and cooler day by day.

In the summer of 1936, an alleged Royist document came into the hands of CSP leadership in which Royists were exhorted to "liquidate" the party. It naturally produced a great consternation in the CSP leader-

ship. When such a Royist document of alleged condemnation of the CSP was placed before the National Executive at the time of the second annual Conference of the party at Meerut, the Royists completely disowned it. Two Royist members of the Executive, Rajani Mukherji and Charles Mascernes, even vociferously dubbed the document as spurious.

However, notwithstanding his such unfriendly acts, Roy, on his release from prison in November 1936, was extended by the CSP a "most hearty welcome" and it was hoped that "this veteran revolutionary" would utilise every opportunity to unify the anti-imperialist struggle and unite the Socialist movement in the country." Nehru also, as the leader of the left wing, whole-heartedly welcomed him. Nevertheless, within a few month's time some of the public utterance of Roy, such as, that there should be 'no party within the Congress, that 'abolition of Zamindari a remote issue', that 'there should be no organisation of the peasantry apart from the Congress Committees' began to disturb the CSP leadership. These statements of Roy were definitely against the party line and invoked hostility. Roy, however, allowed his followers to continue to remain in the CSP despite such accusations of the party. Even at the time of the third annual session of the All India Congress Socialist Party, which was held in December 1936, at Faizpur, the Royists en bloc voted in favour of the party resolutions.

Sometime in February 1937, the Bombay CSP was forced to expel three Royist members, Charles Mascernes, Dr. M.R. Shetty and Madan Shetty for sabotaging the election of CSP's own candidate in favour of the Congress candidate in February 1937 elections to the AICC and Bombay PCC. In the following month at the time of the National Convention, the Royists exhibited their open hostility on the question of office acceptance, and contemptuously spurned the well declared CSP's policy of outright rejection of office. It was just after this clash that Royists decided to smash up the CSP and the procedure adopted was mass resignations. These mass resignations were soon carried out amidst furious attempts to discredit the Party by a series of statements condemning the CSP's policies and programmes. Thereafter Masani and other CSP leaders charged Roy for breaking the Unity of CSP. Masani also wrote in his party organ, *Congress Socialist* :

"I am able to disclose that on the evening of 20th or 21st March at Delhi, Mr. Roy called a select band of his followers from different provinces including certain members of the Congress Socialist Party to a secret meeting in which he planned the disruption of CSP through the method of resignations in one province after another."

Accordingly in April 1937, twenty-six Royist members of the Maharashtra Provincial CSP resigned. This was followed by such resignations from other provinces: Sind, Gujarat, Bengal, etc. These resignations were duly attended by the allegations, counter-allegations, the

Royists' line of attack against the CSP being that Socialist ideology should be propagated, but the slogan of Socialist leadership should not be raised, the object being to develop the Congress into a real anti-imperialist organisation. This slogan of socialism had divided the Congress into two camps. The slogan of socialist leadership could be given only at a later stage of the struggle. The CSP's attempt to continue Socialism and Communism as one would harm the working class movement. However, the main change was that the CSP was not a true Marxist-Socialist Party.

Roy also considered the CSP's policy as misleading and erroneous in sponsoring the programme of collective affiliation of labour unions and Kisan Sabhas with the Congress Party. He also bitterly attacked the Socialist opposition of both contesting election and acceptance of ministerial offices under the 1935 Constitution of India.

The National Executive of CSP, which met at Patna in August 1937, accused Roy for contemplating secret parties and caucuses, probably turning round selected individuals and not open parties. "What Mr. Roy is really trying to organise is a secret party that will work within the Congress under his leadership. Our fault is that we do not design to hide our identity and sail under the false colours. . .", it remarked.

Thus CSP's reply of Roy's charges brought final break between the two parties. According to Jaya Prakash Narayan, "Thus after more than a year and half of close cooperation, our Royist friends, left us with a parting kick." He charged that, "the entire responsibility for disrupting the measures of unity that had been achieved must be laid at the door of Royists, and above all Shri Roy."

In spite of genuine efforts of the Socialist leadership, the Joint Front with the Roy group, failed to last long and in less than one-and-half-year's time, the Royists left the CSP. However, it has been said that the Royists made an important contribution to the formulation of the Congress Socialist Party's policies and programme in its formative years.

Thus, towards the end of 1935, all hopes of United anti-Imperialist Front were shattered. The Royists pulled in one direction, a section of the Congress Socialist Party took up anti-Soviet stand and the Communist Party of India completely isolated because it was critical of all other leftist parties. Thus they were back in the primitive days of 1934 of mutual jealousy, suspicions and disunity.

### **The CSP and the Unity in the Trade Unions**

The Congress Socialist Party since its very birth in 1934, strived hard to close the ranks of all anti-Imperialist forces to form a genuine United Socialist Front in the country. As a true Marxist Party, the CSP desired an unified trade union movement as an active instrument of anti-imperialist and capitalist struggle. So closely associated with the

problem of Left and Socialist parties unity was the question of unity in the Indian Trade Unions, which attracted the attention of the socialist leadership.

In 1934, there were three main trade union organisations in the country, each having its own political and ideological leanings: The All India Trade Union Congress, The Red Trade Union Congress and the National Trade Union Federation. The All India Trade Union Congress was dominated by the Royists; The Red Trade Union Congress was completely in the hands of the Communists and the National Trade Union Federation, at that time the biggest All India Trade Union Organisation, was in the hands of Moderate Nationalists. First, the CSP entered into an agreement with the AITUC. Then agreement provided that the All India Congress Socialist Party would strengthen the All India Trade Union Congress, so as to make it a more powerful All India Trade Union Organisation. The AITUC, welcoming the formation of the Congress Socialist Party, agreed to strengthen it as an anti-imperialistic bloc within the Congress. It was also agreed that the AITUC would 'use its influence to give facilities to the members of the Congress Socialist Party to work in the trade unions, and whatever trade unions the Socialist Party may form or control, will be affiliated to the Trade Union Congress'.

The CSP's choice fell on AITUC out of the three existing trade unions, as it was ideologically and politically nearest to the party. It naturally implied that the CSP considered the AITUC as the only central organisation of labour and, the latter promised to support the party as the political party of working classes. Soon many trade union leaders started joining the Congress Socialist Party. Prominent among those who sought the membership of the CSP were R.S. Rukar, Sibnath Banerji, Hariharnath Shastri, and R.A. Khadgikar. These leaders had a large following among the labour and exercised great influence in the All India Trade Union Congress. The result of the above agreement was that the CSP's position became dominant in the AITUC.

Encouraged with the above success, the Socialists started negotiations with the other two trade union organisations, and specially the Red Trade Union Congress through which the Communists were mainly functioning. After some time, the party's efforts bore fruits, and an United Front agreement between three all-India labour organisations and the CSP was signed. The agreement called for 'joint action by the All India Congress Socialist Party, the All India Trade Union Congress, the National Trade Union Federation and the Red Trade Union Congress on "specific issues" such as the danger of another war, Government repression, the joint parliamentary Committee Report and other issues, which may arise from time to time'. Joint action was to be for organising meetings, demonstrations, observance of "days", celebrations

of anniversaries and issuing of statements and literatures, etc. As a result of the agreement, the Communists, who had been continuously criticising the CSP since its very birth agreed to cooperate. The agreement, though limited, provided for joint Front in the Trade Unions and other activities.

However, not fully satisfied; Jaya Prakash Narayan, the General Secretary of the CSP, continued his efforts for the complete merger of atleast two labour organisations, namely, AITUC and the RTUC. He wrote to Harihar Nath Shastri, who later presided over the 14th session of the AITUC for the complete merger of the two organisations in the interest of the united trade unionism. Shastri invited Jaya Prakash Narayan for attending the AITUC session as it was widely felt that 'his presence would be very valuable for the trade union unity'. Thus, as expected, happened. In April 1935 by the efforts of Socialist leadership, the two organisations decided to merge themselves at the time of 14th session of the All India Trade Union Congress. The AITUC was recognised as the main central organisation of workers, and it agreed to establish closer relationship with the Congress Socialist Party.

Thus the idea of trade union unity got a further fillip and now the All India Trade Union Congress comprised the Congress Socialists, the Royists, Communists, and all other leftists. After a broad agreement had been arrived at between the Congress Socialists and the Communists, they started negotiations with the NTUF also for bringing the latter within its fold for a complete unity in the trade unions. In August 1935, as a result of negotiations between the AITUC and NTUF, an All India Joint Labour Board consisting of equal number of representatives from each organisation was constituted for the liberation of working classes from the imperialist-cum-capitalist exploitation. The members of this Labour Board were: V.V. Giri, as President; Ruikar as General Secretary and N.M. Joshi, Jamnadas Mehta, Aftabhi, R.S. Nimkar, R.A. Khadgikar and Dr. Shibnath Banerji as members.

The All India Joint Labour Board worked in close cooperation with the Congress Labour Committee and secured the support of the Indian National Congress. In this favourable atmosphere the Socialists began further its efforts for forming a single all India trade union organisation. The All India Trade Union Congress sent its proposal to the National Trade Union Federation for the formation of a joint organisation to be known as AITUC. The terms of the proposal were very much accommodating and they clearly showed the earnestness of the Socialist-dominated AITUC for unity. The NTUF also favourably responded and expressed its desire to merge itself in the AITUC. In the proposal known as 'Giri Proposal' the NTUF offered to affiliate itself with the AITUC, first provisionally for a year only, on the condition that the new AITUC adopted the constitution of NTUF in its entirety.

In May 1936, at the time of the fifteenth session of the AITUC in Bombay, an important step towards trade union unity was taken when the AITUC accepted the terms contained in the Giri proposal with minor modifications as the basis for structural unity with the 'National Trade Union Federation'. The Bombay AITUC session was notable as Jawaharlal Nehru came to attend it as a special emissary of the Congress. Nehru in his twin capacity as the leader of the Congress and chief spokesman of the Congress Socialists appealed to the different trade unions to compose their differences for the sake of unified trade unionism and join hands with the Indian National Congress. In the session, a complete harmony and growing urge for unity was seen among all participants, which included the Congress Socialists, the Communists, the Royists and trade union leaders.

In the meantime, another step towards the trade union unity was taken when the Congress Socialist Party entered into an agreement with the National Trade Union Federation for joint action on agreed political and economic activities. Subsequently, further encouraged by the prevailing cordial atmosphere, the leaders of the two central trade union organisations—the All India Trade Union Congress and the National Trade Union Federation—agreed to sort out their differences. By the beginning of 1938, they were able to remove all the obstacles and the provisional terms of the treaty were agreed. Consequently, in April 1938, a special joint session of the two organisations was held at Nagpur under the presidentship of Dr. Suresh Chandra Banerji, where the affiliation of NTUF with the All India Trade Union Congress was ratified. Thus the Socialist dream for trade union unity was realised at Nagpur, where the disastrous schism and drift in the trade union movement had taken place nine years ago. It was a moment of great success for the CSP leadership, which had been right from the beginning striving hard for the trade union unity as a major component of the United Socialist Front. The fourth annual Conference of the All India Congress Socialist Party held in Lahore in April 1938, expressed its great delight, and called it a 'milestone' in the history of the Indian Trade Union movement.

Two years later in September 1940 at Bombay, the National Trade Union Federation forsook its separate identity and completely merged with the All India Trade Union Congress. Thus the CSP's efforts bore fruits and AITUC again became the premier central organisation of the labour in the country.

During the period of the United Front, in the wake of unity atmosphere, the labour movement made rapid strides and spread to a large part of the country. In the year 1934 itself, there were 159 strikes involving 220,808 workers and resulting in the loss of 47,75,559 working days. Most of these strikes were in textile industry and affected



the industrial centres of Bombay, Sholapur, Ahmedabad and Madras. There was also a big increase in the number of unions during this period. The number of registered trade unions, which was the number of trade union strikes swelled to 379, which was highest since 1921. It resulted in the loss of 89,82,000 working days, which was highest since 1929 and it involved 6,47,802 strikers, which was again highest on record in the labour history of the country.

Another striking feature of the period was that the new upsurge in the trade union movement took place when the Congress Ministries were in power in six provinces. It was obviously due to the fact that the Congress Ministries adopted a very sympathetic attitude towards the labour and peasantry. The Congress Labour Committee also worked in close cooperation with the AITUC and it gave new strength to the Labour Movement.

The strike wave affected almost all industries, textile, jute, iron and steel, oil and railways. There was a tremendous increase in the number of unions, their membership and also the number of strikes, during this period. In 1934 the number of registered trade unions was 391, which rose to 667 in 1939-40.

Undoubtedly, the Congress Socialist Party made a singular contribution in uniting the scattered trade unions into one single trade union organisation with its ultimate objective of forming a genuine united anti-imperialist front.

### **The Socialists and the Indian National Congress, 1934-39**

The Congress Socialist Party from its very inception was faced with a severe criticism. In July 1934, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel warned the Congressmen against coming under the spell of socialist ideology, which he described as "remote idealism", a "vain academic discussion" and "mere learned talk". Similarly at the time of the formation of the Gujarat Provincial Congress Socialist Party, he wrote to Rohit Mehta, the leader of the Gujarat CSP: "The Socialists are not agreed even regarding the definition of socialism. . . It is a waste of time to speculate about social and political organisation in the future independent Government of India. . . Some (socialists) merely talk with such persons I shall never be able to get on..." Likewise Dr. Rajendra Prasad, another staunch follower of Mahatma Gandhi, spoke time and again very disparagingly of the Socialists. In August 1934, in an indirect reference, Gandhiji, while speaking before the Zamindars, ridiculed the Marxist concept of class war. He averred:

"Class war is foreign to the essential genius of India. . . . Our socialism or communism should, therefore, be based on non-violence and on the harmonious cooperation of labour and capital, the landlord and tenant."

The Congress Socialist Party leaders also launched the counter-attack both offensive and defensive and the Congress Right Wingers for their lack of understanding of the socio-economic forces of the time. The first Bombay Conference (21-22 October 1934) of the CSP sharply reacted at the Congress working Committee's resolution, which it described as "uncalled for and misleading." It claimed that the participation in the class war and advocacy of expropriation of property, were not inconsistent with the Congress creed. The CSP Conference expressed its apprehension at "the concerted attempts" of the Congress Old Guard (right wing elements) to take back the Congress struggle to the path of constitutional agitation in which the Indian upper classes will have a leading role to play. The resolution adopted at this Conference declared its resolve to thwart all such attempts. It said :

"The Conference resolves to resist these attempts and to rescue the Congress from the hands of the right wing by educating and organising the rank and file on the basis of a clear-cut programme of national revolution and also resolves to carry on a consistent propaganda for the exposure of the reactionary aims, policies and programme of the right wing."

At the Conference, Purshottam Das Tandon accused the right wing leadership of the Congress for trying to "prejudice the un-informed section of the Congress against the socialists," by including in false and mischievous propaganda that the socialists wanted to split the Congress.

However, Jawaharlal Nehru, who though not a member of the CSP, gave a tremendous support to the party, and expressed his resentment at the resolution of the Congress Working Committee. Soon after his release from incarceration, Nehru giving full expression to his profound anger, wrote to Gandhiji on 13 August 1934 : "The resolution of the Congress Working Committee on the subject showed such an astounding ignorance of the elements of socialism that was painful to read it and to realise that it might be read outside India. It seemed the overmastering desire of the (CWC) Committee was somehow to assure various vested interests even at the risk of talking non-sense." Indeed, Nehru's strong protest to Gandhiji had a sobering effect on the official attitude of the Indian National Congress.

The underlying cause of the dissension between the Congress right Wingers and the Congress Socialists was due to both ideological and tactical disagreements in the pursuit of the national struggle though they both agreed that the basic and foremost task before them was the winning of national independence. The CSP set before it a four-fold task for the success of the national movement. The first was to help in building a powerful national front against the British Imperialists. The second was to link the programme of the Congress with the economic struggle of the exploited classes, i.e. to put the welfare of the labour and peasantry

in the forefront of that programme. The third was to check all drift towards constitutionalism, which was weakening the struggle of the national liberation. Fourth was to define Swaraj in terms of the urges and aspirations of the masses. It naturally implied the conversion of the Congress into a Socialist organisation. This conversion of the Congress was to be brought about through ideological conquest in a slow and peaceful manner. The Socialists also wanted the democratisation of National Congress and cutting off its ties with the Swaraj Party, whose leaderships, the Socialists thought, had no interest in organising the masses for their active participation in the national movement. The Socialists also desired that the parliamentary activities be brought wholly under the control of the Congress instead of being carried on by the Swarajists.

At the Bombay session of the Indian National Congress in October 1934, the Socialists made some futile attempts to influence the Congress resolutions through their amendments. Acharya Narendra Deva had moved an amendment for abandoning all parliamentary programmes. "Unless the parliamentary programme was useful to the masses, the Socialists could not support it," remarked Kamla Devi Chattopadhyaya, another Socialist, while seconding the proposed amendment. The Socialists tried to alter the official Congress resolution, which expressed the party's belief in the methods of "non-violent non-cooperation" only. The Socialist amendment sought to commit the Congress to the methods and techniques of "mass direct action of a peaceful nature," which had a broad prespective and meaning. But their amendment was defeated. The Socialists also tried without success to oppose the Congress resolutions on "Labour franchise," "Khadi clause" and the proposed "Constitutional changes." The Socialists were in such a thin minority that all their amendments were defeated.

Jaya Prakash Narayan, who was against any division of the Congress into Socialists and anti-Socialists, said in a deep mental agony on 21 September 1935: "Congress as it is, at present cannot hold together very long. The more successful we are in pushing our programme, the nearer the day when a split will occur in it." He further emphatically stated that "the Congress at present is dominated by upper class interests and its leaders are uncompromisingly opposed to admitting into its objective and programme aimed at economic emancipation of the masses." He held the Congress constitution responsible for it. According to Jaya Prakash Narayan, because of the provision of individual membership, the Congress was not a true representative of the masses, but a handful of members and unless the party constitution is changed it could never become a direct representative of the people. He suggested that the primary committees of the Congress should represent tenants, farmers, labourers, merchants, the professionals and so on... For this he

emphasised on the need of organising these groups and classes of people. However, he made it clear that the first and the main task of the party was to develop the anti-imperialist movement. Similar sentiments were echoed by Sampurnanand, when he called his partymen through a circular letter in 1935, to concentrate on the "organisation of labour and peasantry," and "expose the follies and reactionary policies of the Congress High Command."

### **Meerut Conference of the CSP**

The second session of the All-India Congress Socialist Party was held at Meerut on 19-20 January 1936 under the presidency of Kamla Devi Chattopadhyaya. In her presidential address, she justified the growth of the Socialist Party within the Congress and said that there was "growing alliance between foreign and Indian vested interests." At the conference, a number of resolutions concerning rejection of the new constitution, acceptance of office, demand for a change in the Congress constitution, which would facilitate the adequate representation of the exploited classes of peasants and workers in the party, were passed. Sampurnanand's resolution, among other things, demanded : (i) abolition of landlordism and other forms of intermediaries between the State and the cultivator, (ii) a minimum wage of not less than Rs. 30.00 per 40 hours week, (iii) freedom of speech and press, (iv) cancellation of all arrears of debt and revenue and provision of cheap credit was adopted in its entirety. Similarly, Mohan Lal Gautam's resolution asking the Socialist Parties to organise peasants in their territories and send the delegates to the forthcoming Lucknow Kisan Conference was unanimously adopted. Another important resolution passed by the Conference was moved by Jaya Prakash Narayan, asking the National Congress to elect Jawaharlal Nehru as the President for the ensuing 49th session of the Indian National Congress.

With regard to the CSP's role within the Indian National Congress, the party's thesis adopted at Meerut observed : "The party should take only an anti-imperialists stand on the Congress platform and should not in this connection make the mistake of placing a full Socialist programme before the Congress. An anti-imperialist programme should be evolved for this purpose suited to the needs of workers, peasants and the lower middle classes." The Meerut thesis asked the partymen to carry the Socialist programme from party's own platform. It reaffirmed that "Marxism alone" could guide anti-imperialist forces to their ultimate destiny, and said that the "party members must, therefore, fully understand the techniques of revolution, the theory and practice of class struggle, the nature of the state and the process leading to socialist society." The Meerut thesis also advanced the theory of an "alternative leadership" in place of existing liberal bourgeois leadership of the Indian

National Congress. It further said that "This task can be accomplished only if there is within the Congress an organised body of Marxian Socialists..." "Our party alone can, in the present condition perform this task," the thesis observed.

At the Conference, it was claimed by Jaya Prakash Narayan, the General Secretary of the Party, that the Party had increased considerably its influence in labour and trade union movement and many top-ranking labour leaders were members of the Congress Socialist Party. He claimed that their party included the largest number of peasants and workers in the country. Jaya Prakash Narayan also claimed that the CSP was responsible for organising an All-India Kisan Sabha to be held at Lucknow at the time of the next AICC Session there.

The Socialists, for the purpose of increasing their influence at various levels of the National Congress and for democratization of the Congress apparatus, asked partymen to press forward the following changes in the Congress constitution :

- (i) Provision of functional representation of workers and peasants in the National Congress in consultation with the All-India Trade Union Congress and Peasant organisations.
- (ii) Local organs of the Congress to be enlarged and given more powers of control, direction and initiative.

### **The Socialists and the Lucknow Congress**

The Meerut session of the CSP was followed by the 49th session of the Indian National Congress which was held at Lucknow from 13 to 14 April 1936, under the Presidentship of Jawaharlal Nehru. Nehru's election as the President of the Congress was held at the behest of Mahatma Gandhi, his political Guru. Gandhiji believed that young Nehru would be able to bridge the gap between the Socialists and Rightist Congressmen and infuse the required spirit and dynamism in the National Movement. For the Socialists, it was a heaven sent opportunity for putting pressure on the Congress right wingers for the purpose of radicalising the Congress. The Congress Socialist Party's main thrust was to oppose the new constitution, office acceptance under it and opposition to India's participation in any imperialist war and for the setting up of a committee for the democratic revision of the Congress Constitution.

Apart from this, the Socialists wanted the linking of "the daily struggle of the exploited classes" as an integral part of the national struggle : organisation of workers and peasants as the main items of the constructive programme and "direct representation" of the toiling masses of workers and peasants.

However, in the Lucknow Congress session, the Socialists achieved only partial success. The presidential address of Jawaharlal Nehru was

a full-throated socialist exposition in its complete Marxist setting. In his address, Nehru said that the biggest problem before the Congress was how to forge a broad united front of all the anti-imperialists in the country so as to make the national struggle a mass struggle of peasants and workers. About socialism, he frankly declared :

“I am convinced that the only key to the solution of the problem of India and the world lies in socialism, and when I use this word, I do so not in a vague humanitarian way, but in the scientific, economic sense. Socialism is, however, something even more than an economic doctrine. It is a philosophy and as such also, it appeals to me.”

Nationalism for him was not merely throwing off foreign yoke, but it was something more than that. He said : “I work for it even more because for me, it is the inevitable step to social and economic change.” I should like the Congress to become a Socialist organisation and to join hands with the other forces in the world, who are working for the new civilisation.”

Nehru also raised his voice against the growing divorce from the masses. Referring to the role of the Princes and Zamindars, he emphatically declared, “they have long survived the day, propped up by an alien power and they will have to go. The Socialists were thrilled to find such a remarkable socialist exposition coming as it did from the President of the Indian National Congress. Indeed it was a moment of their great success. They fully acclaimed it and saw in it the vindication of their stand.

Evidently, it must be said that his speech was a complete break from the past Congress presidential addresses as it suggested Marxian Socialism as the only panacea for all the existing problems.

Among the socialist proposals, one for collective affiliation of trade unions and Kisan Sabhas with the Congress was accepted by the National Congress. Instead of collective affiliation a mass contacts committee was appointed consisting of Rajendra Prasad, Jairamdas Daulatram and Jaya Prakash Narayan. The inclusion of Jaya Prakash Narayan in the Committee was a big success of the Socialists. Another important Socialist success was adoption by the Congress, of the resolution on agrarian programme, which stated : “This Congress is of opinion that most important and urgent problem of the country is the appalling poverty, unemployment and indebtedness of the peasantry fundamentally due to antiquated and repressive land tenure and revenue systems . . .”

The Socialists also made futile attempts to associate the Congress movement with the struggle in the Princely States. The Socialists and Nehru also suffered a setback on the crucial issue of office acceptance under the Government of India Act, 1935. Nehru and his Socialist colleagues were vehemently against ‘office acceptance’ and they wanted an unequivocal rejection of office in advance.

However, the most outstanding Socialist success was Kamla Devi Chattopadhyaya's amendment opposing the abolition of proportional representation in the elections to the AICC. This was the first Socialist victory in the open session. It was also Jawaharlal Nehru's victory as it vindicated his opposition to the abolition of proportional representation as against the views of the Congress Working Committee. This ensured the Socialists some representation on that body. Another important Socialist success was the inclusion of three CSP leaders in the next Congress Working Committee, which was constituted by Jawaharlal Nehru. The Working Committee now included among others Jaya Prakash Narayan, Acharya Narendra Deva and Achyut Patwardhan.

In the next three months immediately following the Lucknow Session, Nehru gave full expression to his Socialist views. Thus both at Lucknow and in the days that followed Nehru spoke and acted in a manner, in which he appeared to the Congress old guard as the god-father and the chief spokesman of the Congress Socialist Party. Alarmed by this, the six members of the Congress Working Committee led by Rajendra Prasad and Rajagopalachari tendered their resignations to the President. The old guard complained against Nehru's ideological alignments with the CSP and a tacit support to Socialists in their hostile campaign against them. These resignations were the high water-mark of the protracted ideological clash that was going on between the Congress Socialists and the right wingers for quite some time. However, these resignations were later withdrawn after Gandhiji's intervention.

Thus the grave crisis, which threatened split in the Indian National Congress passed off smoothly. It ended in the victory of Nehru and other Socialists over the entire right wing leadership. The right wing leadership was compelled to accommodate the Congress Socialists and their revolutionary socialist ideology.

### **Congress Election Manifesto and the Socialists**

The third important Congress document, which bore the impress of the socialism was the Congress election manifesto. It was heartily welcomed by Socialist leader, Acharya Narendra Deva, as a "revolutionary document" and he declared CSP's full support to the Congress in the elections. Undoubtedly, the manifesto due to its socialist orientation had the mass appeal and helped the Congress to win the general elections with a thumping majority.

### **Faizpur CSP**

The Third annual conference of the CSP was held at Faizpur on 23-24 December 1936, under the presidentship of Jaya Prakash Narayan. Jaya Prakash Narayan in his presidential address stressed on the need of broadening the base of the Congress. He said that the 'Congress

should identify itself with the struggling masses', and the entire masses should be roused to activity, then the national movement would itself rise to the "unprecedented height". The Conference also adopted a thesis, known as 'Faizpur Thesis' which was an extension and alteration of the earlier 'Meerut Thesis' of the party. The Faizpur thesis reiterated that "the chief task for the Socialists was the creation of a powerful National Front against Imperialism."

The Faizpur Conference adopted a number of resolutions on the danger of war, boycott of King's coronation, release of political prisoners, New Constitution, the Congress Election Manifesto and Bengal Nagpur Railway strike, etc.

### **The Faizpur Session of the Indian National Congress**

The 50th session of the Indian National Congress was held at Faizpur on 27 and 28 December 1936, with Jawaharlal Nehru as the President for a second term in succession. The Faizpur session of the Congress was in itself important as it was the first to be held in a village and was the result of the desire expressed by Gandhiji, and the mass agrarian consciousness created by the Congress Socialist Party, Jawaharlal Nehru in his presidential address with some minor alterations here and there repeated his earlier formulations such as that "Socialism seems to be the only remedy for India's ills", that Indian problem was deep seated and required a radical revolutionary remedy and that remedy was the 'Socialist structure of the Society'.

The Faizpur Congress in all passed 22 resolutions, some of which bear clear impression of Congress Socialist Party's ideology and programme. A resolution on war moved by Acharya Narendra Deva, declaring that India will not be a party to any imperialist war, was unanimously adopted. Jaya Prakash Narayan tried in vain to oppose the resolution for the postponement of the decision on office acceptance. However, the most important success of the Congress Socialist Party was in the passing of twelve-point full-fledged Agrarian Programme for rendering immediate relief to the starving peasantry. The Faizpur Congress was on the whole a notable success for the Socialists. Many of the other resolutions adopted by the Congress at this session were the products of the Socialists' influence, pressure and propaganda. The resolution on agrarian programme, the war, the mass contacts, the railway strikes were passed in the teeth of the Congress right wing opposition. Apart from these resolutions, several others which came from the Working Committee were amended in the manner desired by the Socialists.

It cannot be denied that in the period around Faizpur, the CSP was at the height of its success. The President of the National Congress twice in succession was a thorough-going Socialist, the Socialist ideology in its Marxian form was expounded from the tribune of the Congress.



Three radical documents showing a clear impress of socialism were passed in less than a year's time.

In 1937 elections, Congress swept the polls and captured 716 seats out of the 1161 contested. Out of the eleven provinces, in the five the Congress secured absolute majority. In four others, the party emerged as the single largest political party. This sweeping Congress victory at the polls was largely on account of party's identification with the struggle of the masses, and the credit for it, undoubtedly, goes to Jawaharlal Nehru and the CSP leadership.

### **Office Acceptance**

Right from the beginning the CSP was opposed to the Government of India Act, 1935, and the office acceptance under it. The CSP leadership was of the view that it would 'prevent the growth of revolutionary mentality' which was the bedrock of the anti-imperialistic struggle. But in spite of Congress Socialist Party's bitter opposition, the AICC met in Delhi on 17-18 March 1937 and decided in favour of office acceptance.

The Socialists regarded the sharing of power under the Government of India Act, 1935, as a blunder of the first magnitude. They formed an anti-Ministry Committee and continued a raging and teaching campaign against office acceptance. The Socialist members of the CWC (Narendra Deva, Jaya Prakash Narayan and Achyut Patwardhan) to register their protest, even resigned from the Committee. The Socialists along with other left wingers organised a protest day throughout the country on 1 April 1937, the day on which the new constitution was to start working.

### **CSP and Congress Ministries**

The Congress ministries were formed in seven out of the 11 provinces of British India. As soon as the Congress ministries were formed, the friction arose between the CSP and the Congress ministries. First, it arose over the provincial budgets. The CSP leadership wanted more relief for the peasants and workers. Other important issue on which the Socialists differed with Ministerialists was the question of civil liberty, that implied the release of the political prisoners. The Socialists complained that the official Congress viewpoint was to soft pedal the issue. On all these issues, in the estimation of the Socialists the Congress ministries fell much below their expectations.

### **CSP and the Peasants**

But the most important issue, which brought about bitter estrangement between the Congress Socialists and the Congress right wingers was the Kisan Movement, which was making rapid strides in those days. The conflict between Congress and Kisan Sabha and Socialist leaders

was especially acute in Bihar where the Congress Ministry had brought a Bihar Tenancy Bill. The provisions of the Bill were pro-landlord, the Bihar Kisan leaders severely criticised it as a 'surrender to the enemies of the Kisans by a Congress Government'. The growing ill-feeling between the two wings were further aggravated, when the Bihar Kisan Sabha leader, Swami Sahjanand Saraswati proclaimed the right of Kisans to carry 'Danda' with them as a necessary measure of self-defence. But it was not acceptable to Gandhi and other Congress right wing leaders. When the Bihar Congress Committee decided to take disciplinary action against Congressmen, who participated in peasant demonstrations, Jaya Prakash Narayan severely criticised the right winger. He wrote : "If the Congress authorities were to be so unwise as to take disciplinary action, the Kisan Sabhaites would have to part company with the Congress, just as Lokmanya Tilak had to do in the past".

The Socialists along with Kisan Sabhaites complained that the Congress policy was aimed at appeasing the landed aristocracy. In an unguarded moment, Jaya Prakash Narayan threw his challenge to the right wingers. He declared : "Gandhism has played its part. It can not carry us further and hence we must march and be guided by the ideology of Socialism. We may suffer political persecution at the hands of the Congress and even be driven out of it, but a day will come when the Congress will become ours."

### **The Socialists and the Haripura Congress**

It was in this hostile atmosphere that the 51st session of the Indian National Congress met at Haripura, Gujarat, from 19 to 21 February 1938, under the Presidentship of Subhas Chandra Bose. Hardly had the Haripura Congress begun its business, the most exciting news came regarding the resignations of Congress ministries of Bihar and United Provinces over the question of civil liberties.

It was a thrilling development for the Socialists as it vindicated their stand. The Socialists had deeply regretted that even after six months of Congress rule, the Statute Book still carried the anti-civil liberty laws. There were still a considerable number of prisoners behind bars, the Socialists had raised the slogan, not a 'prisoner behind the bars'. When one of the detainees died in jail, Jaya Prakash Narayan had thundered, 'release or resign'. Thus, though somewhat belated, the resignations were in complete accord with the CSP's well thought-out line of action. A few months later, the CSP at its Lahore Conference also praised the Congress for its bold decision.

An equally and perhaps more puzzling issue before the Haripura assemblage was that relating to the Kisan Movement, which was tending to take the form of Gandhism versus Socialism. However, a resolution that was passed at Haripura tried to end the prevailing hostile atmos-

phere between Kisan Sabhas and the Congress, when it described the peasant movement as an integral part of the National Movement and called the Congress in the main "a Kisan organisation".

Apart from this, there were two other issues on which the Socialists sharply differed from the Congress right wingers. These issues were the States' people's struggle and the proposed Federation. Nevertheless, at the Haripura session, the crisis that was looking so imminent between the two wings of the Congress was ward off, at least for the time being.

### **The Socialists and the Tripuri Congress**

The crisis that was brewing within the Indian National Congress for quite sometime came to a head at the time of the 52nd session of the Indian National Congress held at Tripuri in March 1939. The fresh trouble arose when the Congress President, Subhas Chandra Bose, following the footsteps of his predecessor, decided to contest the presidential election for the second time in succession. It was on 21 January 1939 that Bose had announced his candidature, subsequent to Maulana Azad's decision to withdraw his name. In his statement, Bose said that he had been receiving pressing requests from the Socialists as well as other left wingers from different parts of the country to contest the Congress presidential election. Here it will be important to note that though Bose was not a member of the Socialist Party, but for all practical purposes, like Nehru, he was completely aligned with the party.

For quite some time prior to the Tripuri Congress, Bose had been telling his countrymen that a "compromise over the Federal Scheme would be a suicidal folly" and it would mean the end of the struggle for independence. And, this was completely in consonance with the CSP's policy on proposed Federation. On 24 January 1939, in his reply to the allegations of the six members of the Congress Working Committee, Bose said it was "widely believed that there was a prospect of a compromise on the Federal Scheme between the right wing of the Congress and British Government, so the attempt to set up a rightist for the presidential office is full of great significance." He further said that the main issue of the presidential contest was the attitude to be adopted towards the "Federal Scheme". As mentioned earlier, the Congress Socialist Party was set against the Federal Scheme. The CSP leaders, through their speeches and writings, vigorously opposed the entire scheme when it was first announced.

On the eve of the presidential election, Bose stressed on the need of unanimity on the leadership question. However, he frankly stated, "I insist that for the coming year we should have as president a person, who will be anti-Federationist to the core of his heart, a person, who commands the respect and confidence not merely of the right wing but also of the left." He ended by saying that he was a candidate by mere

accident "as nobody else from the left had come forward to contest the election."

However, right wing leaders were determined to oust a leftist Congress President. The rightists were so much confident of their victory that they had turned down Bose's suggestion for electing such a non-controversial figure as CSP leader, Acharya Narendra Deva. On 29 January 1939, contrary to their expectations, Subhas Chandra Bose was re-elected President of the Congress defeating his only rival Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya by a margin of 205 votes. The final figures were : Subhas Chandra Bose—1580 ; Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramaya—1375. The socialists, the Communists, and Royists had all voted en bloc in favour of Bose, thus facilitating his smooth and decisive victory over the right wing candidate. It was not Bose's personal victory, but the victory of Socialists and entire left wing of the country. It was a defeat of the Congress old guard with their stand on issues like collective affiliation, civil liberties, peasant movement, and the Federal Scheme. Hence, it was a moment of great jubilation for the CSP. But that was the beginning of bigger crisis.

Gandhiji and his colleagues were completely perturbed by Bose's decisive victory. Gandhiji is reported to have remarked : 'The defeat is more mine than his (Sitaramayya)'. He frankly admitted : "It is plain to me that the delegates do not approve of the principles and policy for which I stand." He advised Bose to choose his own homogenous cabinet and enforce his radical ideology and programme. But behind these plain words, there was a open threat of "non-cooperation" from the right wingers. Bose understood the implications of this rightist reaction. Hence with a view to avoid a showdown he tried to pacify Gandhiji and other right wingers. On 15 February 1939, Bose went to Wardha and met Gandhiji, but nothing came out of it. Soon to precipitate a grave crisis, twelve members of the CWC, tendered their resignations, leaving Nehru, Sarat Bose and Subhas Chandra Bose in the Working Committee.

Jawaharlal Nehru was faced with a dilemma. Politically and ideologically, he was closer to Bose and CSP leadership, but was emotionally attached to Gandhiji. In the whole tragic drama, he desperately tried to preserve the unity of the party.

It was in this tense atmosphere that the Tripuri Congress met on 8-12 March 1939. On 12 March, the right wingers struck their blow through a resolution moved by Govind Ballabh Pant, which reiterated its faith in the Gandhian leadership and policies followed during the last 20 years and asked to Bose nominate the new Working Committee 'in accordance with the wishes of Gandhiji'. The Pant resolution was passed by 218 to 133 votes in the Subjects Committee and by an overwhelming majority in the open session. The resolution was indeed a vote of censure against the President for his opposition to the Gandhian policies in the conduct of national struggle. It eventually led to Bose's resignation from

presidentship on 29 April 1939, at the Calcutta session of the AICC and his later forming of Forward Bloc. The Congress Socialist Party, the main architect of India's Socialist Movement, decided to remain neutral and hence abstained from voting on the Pant Resolution. Explaining this 'volteface' of the Party, Jaya Prakash Narayan averred :

"Our party voted for Subhas Chandra Bose ... because we preferred him to the other candidate, namely Dr. Pattabhi. We then never expected that it would lead to schism in the Congress. Our party does not and will not participate in this quarrel."

The attitude of the Congress Socialist Party has been severely criticised by its own party men and other left-wingers. In view of the fact that it was the neutrality of the CSP that enabled the rightists to eventually succeed. Subhas Chandra Bose also complained that if the CSP had supported him and voted against the Pant resolution, it would have been certainly defeated. He even called it a big "betrayal of CSP". But the most scathing criticism of the CSP came from M.N. Roy, who wrote :

"They have soiled the red flag of revolution, which they hoisted with quixotic fervour and stupid fanaticism. They have hauled down the flag of revolution and with a misconceived notion of national unity, capitulated abjectly before the flaunting banner of victorious reaction."

Undoubtedly, the CSP's policy on the Pant Resolution had a paralytic effect on the growing Indian Socialist Movement. Jaya Prakash himself, later, accepted that the Tripuri crisis 'hit our party very hard'. However, in defence of the CSP's policy of neutrality, it could be easily argued that the party considered the winning of Independence as the foremost important task before the country. And, if the Pant Resolution had been defeated, it would have led to a split in the National Congress, which would have been disastrous for the Indian National Movement. Hence, the CSP rightly trode the path of neutrality.

### **The Socialists and the 'Quit India' Movement**

Since the outbreak of the Second World War, the Socialists had been harping on the Congress high command to take full advantage of the international situation for furthering the cause of India's independence.

The Socialists were against India's participation in any imperialist war. They were convinced that the imperialists would not leave their vast colony on their own unless they were forced to do so. Hence, they were critical of the Congress involvement in the constitutional activities and parliamentary parleys which, according to them, were imperialist devices to hoodwink the national leadership and sidetrack the main goal of the national movement, the complete emancipation of the country.

By 1942, the European war theatre had moved to India's doorstep with the fall of Singapore in February and Rangoon in March (1942) in Japanese hands. This compelled the then British Prime Minister Winston

Churchill, the each arch enemy of India's independence, to send in March 1942, Sir Stafford Cripps, a Cabinet Minister, with fresh proposals to be settle the Indian political deadlock. The Cripps Mission soon proved to disappointing to the Congress leadership and the Congress Socialist Party bitterly opposed it. Congress Socialists even condemned Cripps as an agent of British reaction and his mission, the Socialists felt, was 'the result of American pressure...' Even Nehru felt that it was sad beyond measure that a man like Sir Stafford Cripps should himself become the 'Devil's Advocate'. Gandhiji is reported to have remarked on the Cripps proposals: 'Why accept a post-dated cheque on a bank that is obviously falling'. The Cripps Mission, however, further stimulated the separatist and communal policy of the Muslim League.

The failure of the Cripps Mission further augmented Congress disgust and distrust towards the British, who now felt fully convinced that the British Government had no intention to grant independence to India. The CSP leadership had already been stressing that the British were not going to relinquish their power as a reward for Indian cooperation in the war. They regarded Britain's war against Germany as an imperialist war and called upon the people to launch direct opposition to the British war efforts through every conceivable methods including defiance of the ordinances and Defence of India Act and clamoured for the organisation of peasants' agitations, general strikes, etc. The Socialists also stressed the need for direct, mass militant action programme for ending the imperialist hold on India.

However, the party was not prepared to force the issue and waited till 8 August 1942, when the Congress passed the "Quit India" resolution at its Bombay AICC session. Gandhiji declared, "I have pledged the Congress and Congress will do or die". In a sense of deep personal anguish, Gandhiji is reported to have remarked, "The voice within me tells me I shall have to fight against the whole world...Even if the whole of India tries to persuade me that I am wrong, even then I will go ahead...I can not wait any longer for Indian freedom. I can not wait until Mr. Jinnah is converted...If I wait any longer, God will punish me. This is the last struggle of my life." At the conclusion of the AICC, Gandhiji gave his blessings to his partymen in memorable words: "Here is a *Mantra*, a short one, that I give you: you may imprint it in your hearts and let every breath of yours give expression to it. The *Mantra* is: 'Do or die'. We shall either free India or die in the attempt. To some, it sounded un-Gandhian and a call for open rebellion. Truly, it was a serious departure from old Gandhian tactics of non-violent, non-cooperation. In passing such a bold radical resolution, undoubtedly, the Congress High Command had been largely influenced by the Congress Socialist Party and other left-wing elements in the country.

The news of the 'Quit India' resolution moved the Government

machinery with lightening speed and in the early hours of 9 August 1942, Gandhiji and all other members of the Congress Working Committee were arrested under the Defence of India Rules. Gandhiji was kept in Agha Khan palace in Poona, Nehru and other leaders in Ahmadnagar fort. The arrest of top Congress leaders invoked immediate and spontaneous reaction from the people. There were demonstrations and processions everywhere. Public life came to a standstill. Congress was declared an illegal organisation and its leaders arrested. When the 'Quit India' movement was at its crest of rising national wave, it lacked leadership and organisation to guide and control it. Thus in eight years after CSP's birth, an opportunity came, which placed the party at the helm of the national struggle. It gave the CSP a chance to prove the effectiveness of its theory of direct militant struggle against the British. It was both a challenge and an opportunity for the CSP, which had all along been condemning Gandhian method of non-violent non-cooperation as tactics of the national struggle. Even the passing of the 'Quit India' resolution by the Indian National Congress during the difficult war times signified a compromise with the tactics and programme of the Congress Socialist Party. Thus, by force of circumstances, the CSP was called upon to perform the historic task of leading the August Movement. But by the time the 1942 Movement started, most of the Socialist leaders were behind bars. On 9 November 1942, Jaya Prakesh Narayan, the Party's General Secretary, who had been in jail since 1940, in a most heroic feat, managed to escape from the Hazaribagh Central prison, and he, along with three other Socialist leaders Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, Achyut Patwardhan and Aruna Asaf Ali took up the task of organising and directing the 'Quit India' movement. For this purpose, they set up a Central Directorate in Bombay and a parallel guerilla organisation known as Azad Dasta, with its branches all over India, for carrying sabotage operations and other violent activities. The Central Directorate worked in the name of the Indian National Congress. But as Gandhiji was not prepared to allow sabotage and other violent form of activities under the banner of the Congress, this was done by the secret organisation, Azad Dasta. Apart from these two organisations those who strictly adhered to the creed of non-violent, non cooperation formed a separate committee called the 'Satyagraha Samiti' headed by Sucheta Kripalani.

The 1942 movement surpassed all previous Congress-led struggles in its militant tone and character. The movement soon developed into an open revolt. The revolt was spearheaded by Congress Socialists, students peasants and workers. There were hartals in colleges, schools, post offices, stations and factories. Everywhere British authority was challenged. Peasants threatened withholding of rents and Government dues. At several places telephone wires were cut and Government property burned.

In 16 districts of U.P. and Bihar normal communication was completely disrupted. Sabotage operations were conducted on all vital points. Government resorted to Martial Law, which was proclaimed in several parts of the country. Thousands of men and women were mercilessly attacked, tortured, arrested and shot down. Even women and children were not spared by the guardians of law and order. The mounting police repression and 'Ordinance Raj' further infuriated the people to rise in open revolt. The main storm centres of rebellion were in Northern and Western Bihar, eastern U.P., Midnapur in Bengal and some parts of Maharashtra, Karnataka and Orissa.

Most of the CSP leaders went underground and guided the movement from their hidden cells. Jaya Prakash Narayan organised and led the movement in Bihar, Bengal and Nepal, Aruna Asaf Ali in other parts of Northern India, and Achyut Patwardhan in Bombay. By the heroic part played by Socialists and other revolutionaries, the 'Quit India' movement soon spread thick and fast throughout the country. A secret radio station known as 'Azad Hind Radio' was set up at Bombay, which was operated by Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia. British authorities were challenged and uprooted at several places; parallel 'National Government' were set up at Satara in Bombay presidency, Midnapore in Bengal, Ballia in U.P., and many other places. Out of these, the National Government set up at Satara, named as 'Prati Sarkar' was most well-organised, and it had all the semblance of an independent Government and it lasted for quite sometime.

The success of the movement soon brought a shiver of disquietude in the bosom of the imperialist Government, which tried to crush it by all possible means. The Congress Socialists led underground movement posed a serious challenge to the British authorities. The Government considered the CSP as its worst enemy. A prize of several thousands of rupees was announced for the arrest of CSP leaders like Jaya Prakash Narayan and Achyut Patwardhan. Official law, enforcing machinery tried its best to lay its hands on these leaders, but on each occasion, they outwitted Policy and CID personnel.

Jaya Prakash Narayan, the main architect of the 'August Movement' saw in it the possibility of a complete overthrow of British power. His two secret letters entitled "To All Fighters of Freedom" clearly indicated the direction, which he wanted to give to the movement. He was averse to any talk of compromise, either with the British or with the Muslim League. "Pay the oppressor in his own coin", was the dictum of his movement. Jaya Prakash Narayan had categorically told all the fighters for freedom: "We have declared ourselves independent, and also named Britain as an aggressive power. We are, therefore, justified within the terms of Bombay resolution itself, to fight with arms."

After initial success, when the movement showed a gradual decline,



Jaya Prakash Narayan exhorted the freedom fighters not to get panicky. In a pamphlet bearing A.B.C. of dislocation, which proves him to be a great revolutionary, he averred:

“The upsurge, which marked the first phase of our Revolution has now declined. This should cause no undue anxiety. It is in the nature of mass upheavals—that they do not remain for long at the height of their intensity. Either a mass rising must secure within a short time its objective or its intensity must wane. The waning of its intensity, however, does not mean that all is over with it. In a revolution ups and downs are natural. The masses move forward and retreat and they move forward at one tremendous leap. For certain reasons, they failed to reach their objective and retreated. It is certain that they shall advance again.”

According to an official estimate, 91,836 people by the end of 1943, had been put behind bars, with 24,416, the highest number coming from Bombay Presidency, followed by 16,796 and 16,202, from U.P. and Bihar, respectively. 208 police stations, 322 railway stations and nearly 945 post offices had been destroyed or damaged. There were about 664 cases of bomb explosions in which Bombay recorded the highest figure of 447. One thousand and sixty people had been killed in the police firing and nearly 2,000 seriously injured.

Unfortunately on 19 September 1943, Jaya Prakash Narayan, the hero of ‘August Movement’ was arrested, while travelling incognito in a train to the Punjab, and kept in Lahore Fort. Similar fate followed on Lohia and other Congress Socialist leaders. Later, Jaya Prakash Narayan along with Lohia was put in Agra Central Prison. However, the underground movement with sporadic guerilla activities continued till 1944, when it came to an end.

The ‘Quit India’ movement though failed to wipe out the British Government from India, the movement, at least for a time, swayed and shook the Imperialist Government, while it gave the national movement a new thrill of life, hope and activity. Indeed it marked the culmination of Indian freedom struggle. After the ‘Quit India’ movement, the attainment of Indian freedom was no longer in doubt; it remained only a question of time when the power was to be ultimately transferred to the Indian hands. On the other hand, the 1942 movement clearly demonstrated before the national leadership the futility of clinging to the hackneyed tactics of non-violent civil disobedience and called upon them to keep pace with the time spirit. Obviously, the credit for it goes to the Congress Socialist Party and its leadership. The Party by its magnificent and heroic role became the most prominent in the country. Even during the years of its banishment, when it was outlawed by the Government, the CSP remained very popular and its leader, Jaya Prakash Narayan, became almost a legendary figure.

Undoubtedly, by its role in the ‘Quit India’ movement, the Congress

Socialist Party has left an undelible mark in the annals of national struggle for freedom.

As we have noted, the whole country was convulsed by the mass uprising of the people. Though the Government had been able to crush the 1942 rebellion, it had convinced them that they could no longer indefinitely rule over India. The saner section of the British Government had definitely come round to the view that soon the modalities should be worked out for granting independence to India.

Meanwhile, outside India, the world pressure had been maintaining on such a diehard conservative as Churchill to take steps for bringing about a solution of the Indian deadlock. In 1984, he was compelled to order the release of Mahatma Gandhi and by the middle of June 1945, Lord Wavell, the Viceroy, released all the members of the Congress Working Committee. The Viceroy called a Conference of Indian political leaders at Simla, for ending the Indian political impasse. The Simla Conference proved a total failure as it could not arrive at a workable solution. In fact, it could satisfy none. However, the outcome of the conference further confirmed the suspicion of Nehru and the CSP leaders of the intentions of the British Government, as Lord Wavell had acted as a total partisan of the Muslim League.

The Congress Socialist Party, on account of its active participation in the 'Quit India' movement was the worst sufferer. The Party was outlawed and most of its leaders and party workers were put behind the bars. Even after the release of the majority of Congress leaders, the Congress Socialist Party leaders remained in jail as they were considered the most dangerous by the British Government. Hence, the CSP remained moribund till the beginning of 1946. It was revived by the middle of 1946, when Jaya Prakask Narayan was released on 12 April 1946, and the ban on the party was lifted by Congress Ministries.

### **CSP and the Demand of Pakistan**

Before we proceed further to study the final act of the peaceful revolution leading to the transfer of power in Indian hands, it would be worthwhile to pause a little to examine what was the attitude of CSP at the Muslim League's demand of a separate 'Homeland for the Indian Muslims' and how they differed with other left wingers—the Communists. The CSP leaders right from the beginning repudiated the two-nation theory, which they considered as Imperialists' stratagem to divide the country. They held that both Hindus and Muslims had been living in this country for centuries together and religion alone could not be accepted as the sole criterion for creating a sovereign new state. They further argued that the artificial creation of Pakistan would not solve the problems facing both the communities; instead, it would rather complicate problems and worsen Hindu-Muslim relations. CSP leaders—Ashok

Mehta and Achyut Patwardhan in their small booklet, *The Communal Triangle in India* remarked, "We find the extreme demand of Pakistan, to be fraught with incalculable mischief. They open a perspective of hate and fear that will end in disintegration of India and an intensification of her political and social malaise."

The Socialist leaders expressed their fear that how such a mass transfer of population could take place? They held that the fundamental task before the country was how to achieve freedom of India and to preserve the political integrity of the Indian sub-continent. The Socialists believed that the economic backwardness was the main problem before both the communities and not the communal question. CSP regarded the Muslim League as a rabid communal and reactionary organisation pampered by the imperialists to divide the country. On the other hand, the Communist Party of India, roundly supported the demand of Muslims for a separate State of Pakistan. They held that the distinct linguistic communities in India did constitute separate autonomous or completely free States. Certainly this amounted to giving support to the communal and divisive forces of the country as against India's national unity and territorial integrity.

In August 1945, World War II came to an end and in Britain a Labour Party Government under Attlee was installed in office. In India, it aroused great enthusiasm as the Labour Party during its election campaign had declared its pledge to grant independence to India in the event of its coming to power. However, the British Government decided for 'nothing doing' till the elections were over in early 1946. Meanwhile, the British Government in India committed another serious mistake to rouse the public sentiments when it ordered the trial of Indian National Army (INA) leaders. Throughout the country mass demonstrations were held to demand the release of INA leaders on trial. Nehru and the Socialists bitterly opposed the trial decision and actively helped the INA men. Even the Indian Navy rose in revolt in February 1946. The Royal Indian Navy Ratings' strike along with the Indian Air Force strike rocked the British Government, while it created unprecedented enthusiasm in the people. In this the Socialists and other left wingers played an important role by spreading anti-British feelings in the country.

All this further compelled the British Government to announce in February 1946 that a Cabinet Mission consisting of three Cabinet Ministers would proceed to India in order to negotiate with the leaders of Indian opinion, in association with the Viceroy, and to work the modalities for the framing of a Constitution for India. Great hopes were roused in the Congress circles, when the British Prime Minister, Attlee, on 15 March, assured the Congress leaders that "a minority this time shall not be allowed to obstruct the advance of majority towards freedom." Attlee's announcement of 20 February was a milestone to the transfer of power

in Indian hands.

### **Cabinet Mission and the CSP**

The Cabinet Mission comprising Sir Stafford Cripps, Lord Pethick Lawrence and A.V. Alexander arrived in India on 24 March 1946. The Congress Socialist Party at that time was still suffering from illegality and its front-ranking leaders like Jaya Prakash Narayan, Ram Manohar Lohia, etc. were still behind bars. Aruna Asaf Ali was the only CSP leader, who had been openly working among the people. The Congress leaders were willing to negotiate with the Cabinet Missions; the Socialists were, however, of the opinion that nothing good was to result from the talks. Jaya Prakash Narayan just after his release from jail in April 1946, averred : "I refuse to accept that the Cabinet Mission now in Delhi is out to concede full Independence to India. It is just possible that the negotiations going on in Delhi may break at any moment at any stage". Thus though bitterly opposed to the policy of constitutionalism, the CSP leaders decided not to put obstacles in the Cabinet Mission negotiations with the Congress leaders. On 5 May, a Tripartite Conference between the leaders of the Indian National Congress, the Muslim League and the Cabinet Mission along with the Viceroy, began at Simla. The Conference came to an end on 12 May 1946, followed by the announcement by the Secretary of State for India on 16 May of the proposed plan to resolve the Indian political deadlock. It contained proposals for the future Constitution of India and also envisaged the setting up of an interim Government.

These proposals were welcomed by M.A. Jinnah, on behalf of the Muslim League, as they 'conceded the substance of Pakistan' in the form of compulsory grouping of provinces. The attitude of the Congress Socialists was somewhat different from that of the right wing Congress leadership, who believed in the sincerity of the intentions of the British Labour Government to transfer power to Indian hands. While the Socialists in accordance with the Marxian theory of revolution held that the British would not transfer power to the Indian hands on their own and that the negotiations that they were doing now were the byproduct of the nationwide upheavals of 1942 movement. The CSP rejected the Cabinet Mission proposals as quite inadequate for granting complete independence to country. The Party also considered them to be British device to perpetuate communal division of India. The Congress also expressed its resentment, but was not prepared to follow the CSP's hard line of outright rejection of the proposals. On 20 May 1946, Jaya Prakash Narayan, the General Secretary of the CSP, expressed his Party's reaction in the course of a public meeting at Bombay, in the following words :

"A bitter struggle is ahead, the interim Government contemplated under the Cabinet Mission proposals should make a declaration of inde-

pendence for India, the Viceroy should no more have a voice in the affairs of the country and the interim Government should demand an immediate withdrawal of the British troops from India."

Jaya Prakash Narayan also met the members of the British Cabinet Mission, and apprised them of his party's viewpoint on the matter. His stand was fully ratified by the CSP, when on the eve of Congress Working Committee's meeting, a joint statement was issued by Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, Achyut Patwardhan, Aruna Asaf Ali and Jaya Prakash Narayan from Bombay on 18 June 1946, for further clarifying the Party's stand vis-a-vis, the Cabinet Mission proposals. The Socialists were against holding of Constituent Assembly prior to the departure of British troops from India. They held that such an Assembly would not have full sovereign powers. With this conviction, the Socialists decided to boycott the elections for the Constituent Assembly. The Socialists further demanded that the powers exercised by the Viceroy, both as the Governor-General and as the Crown Representative, must end with the interim period itself. They held that it would be useless to have a Central Government, which does not have sufficient independent power to exercise. The Socialists even censured the British Labour Government and charged that Socialism at home does not imply liquidation of Imperialism abroad.

Attempts were made by Congress High Command to win over the Socialists. Jawaharlal Nehru, as the Congress President, offered Jaya Prakash Narayan a seat in the Congress Working Committee. But it did not make any impact on the CSP, which stuck to its ground firmly. The Socialists criticised the Congress leadership for giving up the revolutionary path and for resorting to constitutionary activities. When the AICC met at Bombay on 6 July to ratify the Congress Working Committee resolution for accepting the Constituent Assembly, the CSP bitterly opposed it. On behalf of the CSP, Jaya Prakash averred: "The 'Quit India Movement had been launched to rid India of British imperial power, but that struggle did not achieve its end, though it released new forces, which have taken the country far towards its goal. The question today before the country was not whether to accept the the so-called Constituent Assembly scheme sponsored by British Imperialism, but how to utilise the new forces to drive the British out of India." He further argued that the Constituent Assembly proposed by the Cabinet Mission could never bring complete freedom for the people of India. Jaya Prakash Narayan held that Cabinet Mission had come only to exploit the differences that existed between the Congress and the Muslim League. In his opinion, the Muslim League was the creation of the British policy of 'divide and rule'. Jaya Prakash Narayan advised his partymen (Congressmen) to work among the Muslims instead of negotiating with the League, as the representative of the Muslims. He

further exhorted his partymen to utilise the forces that had been generated as a result of the 1942 Movement, to drive the Imperialists out of India. He wondered how the CWC had accepted such a defective proposal and requested the AICC not to ratify it.

In the midst of vehement opposition of the Socialists and other left wing parties, the All India Congress Committee endorsed the decision of the Congress Working Committee by 204 to 51 votes, which stated that the Congress would participate in the Constituent Assembly, but not in the proposed Interim Government. However, soon after the departure of the British Cabinet Mission from India, the decision not to join the Interim Government was reversed at Wardha meeting of the Congress Working Committee. Thereafter when the new decision was put before the AICC in September 1946 for its ratification, the Socialists made a futile attempt to obstruct that by their amendment. Here it is interesting to note that when in the AICC meeting the Socialist amendment was ruled out of order by Nehru as Congress President and the official resolution seeking the Congress participation both in the Constituent Assembly and the Interim Government was put to vote, the CSP decided to abstain from voting. Thus, despite its disapproval of the entire scheme of the Cabinet Mission, the CSP leadership was not prepared to go to the length of discrediting their parent organisation and it was here that it differed with the Communists and other left-wing parties. Jaya Prakash Narayan described his party's stand as policy of positive neutrality. Justifying the stand taken by the party, Jaya Prakash Narayan held that if they had voted against the resolution, it would have struck a severe blow to the Congress prestige as the party had already joined the Interim Government. Conversely, the Socialists' vote for the resolution would have meant the party's support for the forces that stood for communalism and constitutionalism. Hence, they decided to remain neutral. Thus, when their party's stand came on the verge of splitting the Congress or seriously discrediting it, the CSP decided to adopt a policy, which can be termed as a policy of 'splendid neutrality', that is, allowing the Congress to have its way without seriously impairing the party's (CSP's) own principles, tactics and programme.

Thus the Socialists refused to join either the Constituent Assembly or the Interim Government. However, there was a section in the CSP, which was against this policy and was inclined to join the Constituent Assembly. The first national Interim Government led by Jawaharlal Nehru was formed in August 1946. At first, the leaders of the Muslim League refused to enter into it. Later, when they did join it, they put all sorts of obstacles in the successful working of the Government in order to prove to the British Government that any practical cooperation and working between the Congress and the League was not possible. Hence the need for the partitioning of the country and the creation of separate

**Muslim State of Pakistan.** In consonance with the League's strategy, the representatives of the Muslim League withdrew from the Interim Government of Nehru as well as from the Constituent Assembly. The League's sectarian and obstructive policy soon had the desired result when on 3 June 1947, the British Government announced the 'Mountbatten Plan' which provided for the Transfer of Power in Indian hands and for the vivisection of the country.

On behalf of his Party, Jaya Prakash expressed deep shock at the attitude of the Muslim League and accused it for stabbing at the back. He did not spare the Congress leaders either and charged them for their compromising policy. According to him, the Congress, by sacrificing the revolutionary goals of the national struggle, was falling step by step into the trap of Imperialist-Communist combination. The Socialists were so much disappointed and disillusioned with the Congress attitude that, at their party's 5th Conference at Kanpur in March 1947, they decided to drop the prefix 'Congress' from the name of the Party, which thenceforth became merely the 'Socialist Party'. It was now no longer obligatory to join Congress for becoming a member of the Socialist Party.

The Kanpur Conference of the 'Socialist Party' thought it desirable to give timely warning to the Congress to ensure socio-economic justice to the masses after Independence. It said : "Every care must be taken that power passes not merely into Indian hands but into the hands of toiling masses. It has become urgent duty of Socialists now to create adequate sanctions so that authority that takes power from British hands is not other than a Government of the toiling people of this country."

In these momentous days events followed quickly. The failure of the Cabinet Mission and the widespread communal riots were followed by Prime Minister Attlee's announcement in Parliament on 20 February 1947, that the British authority of India would be withdrawn not later than June 1948. The climax was the Mountbatten Plan of 3 June 1947, by which the power was to be finally transferred to responsible Indian hands on 15 August 1947. The price was to be the partition of India.

As on many previous occasions, when the 'Mountbatten Plan' of 3 June 1947, already approved by the Congress Working Committee, came up before the AICC, the Socialists, though opposed tooth and nail, to it and especially its partition plan, could not decide what course to adopt. The National Executive of this party, at its meeting held on 10 June 1947, had expressed in no uncertain terms, its disapproval and shock at the proposed division of the country. The resolution, which was adopted at the Conference censured the party leadership for its act of omission and commission. It read *inter alia* :

"Each act of surrender, perhaps not of much importance by itself, but of great effect as a link in the chain, and the refusal of the Congress leadership to prepare a position and hold on it have brought us to this

fateful situation. The Socialist Party must also record its failure and that of wider revolutionary movement in working out an alternative and positive policy."

Yet, the Socialists remained wavering in the AICC and finally decided to abstain from voting. It was thus that the 'Mountbatten Plan' got the approval of the AICC on 14 June 1947. The final voting was 157 to 20.

Regarding the CSP's policy of neutrality, it can be argued, and not without good reason that had the Socialists rallied around themselves all those elements, who were against the division of the country, vigorously pursued their policy, and strengthened the hands of Mahatma Gandhi, the partition of India could have been averted. Mahatma Gandhi, against any vivisection of the country, was seemingly willing to support the Socialists and other left wingers, had they been prepared to launch a nation-wide campaign against the acceptance of 'Mountbatten Plan'. He had clearly told the left-wing parties: "The Congress have signed on your behalf. You can disown them, but you should do so only if you can start a big revolution." However, he was not hopeful that the leftists would launch such an agitation. "I do not think you can do it," he desperately remarked.

Thus, the policy of neutrality, which the CSP adopted twice during the last two years preceding the Independence, when there were critical moments to act, could hardly be said to be beyond reproach or criticism. As such, the party could not be fully absolved from its share of responsibility for the partition of the country.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the CSP in just over a decade of its existence, played a vital role in the struggle for national liberation. It was largely owing to efforts made by the Party that the Congress base was broadened. It became a mass party of workers, peasants and other revolutionary classes, with a progressive ideology, which enabled it to win the 1937 general elections to the Provincial Assemblies with a thumping majority. Again it was largely owing to the heroic part played by the leaders of the CSP that the Congress had successfully launched the 'Quit India' Movement on a country-wide scale, and with such a militant tone and character that it rocked the British power in India and compelled it to think in terms of early transference of power to Indian hands. Surely, the party played a remarkable role in accelerating India's march towards freedom.



## FORWARD BLOC

### **The Background**

The year 1939 may well be described as the sharpest turning point in India's history of struggle for freedom, ever since Mahatma Gandhi came to the fore in 1920. Gandhiji's advent in the public life of India was also an epoch-making event in the annals of India's fight for freedom. Gandhiji entered the fray when the Indian National Congress was passing through a period of transition, reflecting the post-Great War state of the country.

Gandhiji came back to India with methods of struggle which he had experimented and perfected to his satisfaction against the British rulers during his South African days. He had applied non-violent passive resistance for which he had coined the expression 'Satyagraha'. The technique of this struggle involved passive sufferings by the resisters to induce in the minds of the oppressors a change of heart resulting in a change of attitude of the oppressor towards the oppressed and in the process both the parties coming to terms. In other words, the confrontation ended for the time being and a compromise was reached. The essence of passive resistance of 'Satyagraha' inherent in the situation was compromise. As Gandhiji has, so often, said, 'compromise is inherent in Satyagraha'.

The policy and technique of struggle during a given phase of India's struggle for Independence had yielded place to a new policy and a new technique to meet the exigencies of the situation. During the course of the country's struggle for emancipation from bondage of an alien power, newer and newer policies and techniques had to be adopted. From the days of the eighties of the last century when the Indian National Congress saw the light of the day, the instrument of our struggle for national emancipation had gone through the whole gamut of changes, from submitting petitions, waiting on deputations with attendant arts of sycophancy, coaxing and cajoling of the highest seat of authority in India. But the inexorable logic of events hastened up this phase of doleful supplication by the end of the century. The posture of begging and

mournful prayers for a few crumbs of charity yielded place to stentorian demands for Independence, failing which the rulers were called upon to face passive resistance to start with and mass movement following suit.

The movement which originated in the eighties of the last century on a very low key, as a voice of 'Self-Rule' for India by 'Constitutional' means had gone through a stormy course even before Mahatma Gandhi came on the scene. Aurobindo Ghosh on his return to India after fourteen years in England wrote a series of articles in the Journal *Indu Prakash* of Poone. In the third series of articles published under the caption "New Lamps for the Old" (1893-94), Aurobindo Ghosh writing about Congress in Bengal and of the realignment of political forces within it said: "The Congress in Bengal is dying of consumption . . . . Tilak used methods which Indianised the movement and brought it to the masses. To bring in the mass of the people is an indispensable condition for a great and powerful political awakening in India." The Founders of the Congress had for their object "self-Government within the British Empire" and the method to achieve it was 'Constitutional' means. Aurobindo Ghosh further warned the Congress of the same series that unless Congress was democratised and sharpened for struggle, India would go the way of the French Revolution.

He also wrote a series of articles in the *Bande Mataram*, an English daily of Partition days in Bengal, from 19 to 23 April 1907, on "Passive Resistance". It was a sequel to a debate with Bipin Chandra Pal on this issue. Aurobindo opined that 'Passive Resistance' would progressively develop into 'Active Resistance' and, if circumstances demanded, would be aggressive and armed in turn.

In the closing years of the last century and in the first decade of this century, more particularly after the partition of Bengal in 1905, intra-party struggle of the Extremists and Moderates or in the accepted political parlance of 'Leftists' and 'Rightists', both in respect of the means to be adopted for the struggle and the objective to be attained ended in an organisational dichotomy and the nexus was cut asunder as had happened in the Surat Congress in 1907, when the Moderates or Rightists were in control of the Congress. But in fairness to the Extremists or Leftists, it should be stated before we proceed further, that it was Aurobindo Ghosh who spelled out complete Independence as the goal of India's struggle for freedom and that passive resistance as the technique of struggle had the elements of active resistance inherent in it. The context of the formulation of the nexus by Aurobindo left no one in doubt that 'Passive Resistance' was the precursor of the armed resistance.

In 1907, the Extremists had to take leave of the Congress, leaving it to the Liberals or Moderates or Rightists as they were called during those days. But the Extremists left their mark on the struggle for freedom by

throwing up forces standing for armed revolutionary struggle to drive out the British rulers.

The accent of Extremism clothed with deathless determination of the Extremists added a new dimension to the struggle. The dimension of this phase of our struggle in its penultimate stage in the forties reached newer heights in the 'Quit India' Movement, on the one hand, and the unprecedented heights of armed struggle by the army of liberation formed by the legendary Indian National Army (INA), on the other.

By the end of 1920, almost all other forces of struggle for freedom had been absorbed in the sweep of the mass forces released by the non-violent non-cooperation movement. It was the demonstration of the first mass struggle in India after the advent of Mahatma Gandhi to win freedom from unwilling hands of the British rulers. It was a changed socio-political context where the technique of non-violent non-cooperation had been into play. In the changed character of the movement, the objective of the Congress changed from 'Self-Government within the British Empire' to 'Swaraj', leaving it delightfully vague to mean any thing to any body. It was perhaps knowingly done so by the new architect of the Congress Constitution, i.e. Mahatma Gandhi to take his own time to temporise with the development of events in his experimentation with non-violent non-cooperation. Mahatma Gandhi himself while paraphrasing the word 'Swaraj' had said: "Self-Government within the empire, if possible and outside, if necessary"

The change in the objective of the Congress called for a commensurate change in the method to be followed to reach this objective. The earlier 'Constitutional' means was thus correspondingly changed to 'all peaceful and legitimate means'. A shift in the correlation of objectives to be attained and means to be followed invariably resulted in a new combination of these two factors and brought a qualitative change of the factors involved. Till such time as this regrouping of the objective-method axis reached a perfect correlation, internal tension was generated within the instrument of struggle seeking for a change in the objective to answer to the requirements of a newer situation. Ideals and objectives of a given time are, therefore, transformed after an efflux of time with a change in the correlation of the socio-economic forces which make for the motive force of the struggle for freedom.

But the moot point was how to achieve freedom? How would the correlation of forces in a given situation would end in our freedom? And what are the contents of freedom? The objective of 'Self-Rule' posited in 1920 had been subjected to severe agitational pressure till at last the All Parties Conference formed in 1928 after the arrival of the Simon Commission framed a draft constitution of India with 'Dominion Status' as its goal. It was carried in the Calcutta Congress in 1928 by 1350 to 973 votes against the amendment of Subhas Chandra Bose for 'complete

independence with severance of British connection'.

The Calcutta Congress had put the hand of the clock back *vis-a-vis* Madras Congress in 1927 in as much as the objective of 'complete Independence', though unanimously accepted in Madras, was reversed a year later on, on the plea that the Madras decision was "hastily conceived and thoughtlessly passed".

The dichotomy in the objective of the Congress had reached a full circle. Although Gandhiji's Calcutta Resolution had a proviso that failing acceptance of 'Nehru Report' on Dominion Status by December 1929, Gandhiji would become an 'Independencewallah' from January 1930, the stage had been set for an ideological confrontation between Mahatma Gandhi, on the one hand, with his not-so-emphatic declaration of severance of British connection with Subhas Chandra Bose's positive assertion on the character of freedom, on the other hand. Indeed, it was a call for the consummation of the first phase of the National Revolution.

This ideological confrontation was further accentuated in the Lahore Congress of 1929 where Jawaharlal Nehru was chosen as the President by Mahatma Gandhi. On 31 December 1929, Subhas Chandra Bose moved an amendment to Gandhiji's main resolution on independence. The amendment of Subhas Chandra Bose read as follows:

"This Congress resolves on the one hand to carry on a ceaseless campaign in favour of independence with a view to establishing a parallel Government in India, and on the other hand, launch a campaign of civil disobedience including non-payment of taxes and general strikes wherever possible."

In his ceaseless struggle for independence, Subhas Chandra Bose brought to introduce a new instrument in the shape of parallel Government. Therefore, while moving this amendment to the main resolution on Independence, Subhas Chandra Bose made the following observations indicative of the compelling urge to adopt the revolutionary technique of parallel Government to facilitate national revolution: "I do not see how we can arrive at our goal of independence except by setting up in the first instance a parallel government in this country."

Whenever our national movement led by the Congress had brought within its sweep the surging masses drawn from all economic and social categories of society, it had tended to burst at the same crossing the limits of peace and non-violence. Such situation have developed, more often than not, in the sour of the moment. But the norms of Gandhian movement having been transgressed, Gandhiji withdrew the movement. This has been the tragic dilemma of those with whom non-violence was not an article of faith and to whom 'Satyagraha' did not inexorably operate within the limits of compromise.

When Subhas Chandra Bose took it upon himself to sharpen the

ideological dichotomy, the organisational dichotomy tended to travel towards the point of irreconcilability although he was keen to prevent it. In other words, Subhas Chandra Bose not only sought to lend a revolutionary temper to the entire gamut of the national movement but was mindful of not losing Gandhiji's support to the extent possible consistent with his concept of independence and the structure of the organisation complementary to it.

The year 1930 saw a phase 'unity-struggle-unity' Syndrome so to say, within the organisational compass of the National Movement. In terms of the Lahore Congress an oath of Independence was administered throughout the country drafted by Gandhi. *Inter alia*, it said : "...India must sever British connection and attain Purna Swaraj or complete independence". But this was again equated to "Substance of Independence", a phrase used by Gandhiji in *Harijan* (30 January 1930). It is rather distressing and painful to find how the concept of independence changed within a brief span of not more than three months since it was spelled out in the Lahore Resolution of 31 December, 1929. "Independence," "Substance of Independence", "Purna Swaraj" had all been lumped together in one breath to mean the same thing. It came out that before Gandhiji set out for his memorable 'Dandi March' on 12 March 1930, with 78 of his devoted and tried followers to start civil disobedience movement on 6 April, he wrote a letter on 2 March 1930 to the Viceroy, Lord Irwin. How Gandhiji's causitry did not stop at interchanging 'Dominion Status' with independence would be evident from the following lines of the letter. Gandhiji, *inter alia*, wrote to the Viceroy, possibly to assuage him for spelling out 'Independence' as the goal of India. "But the resolution on independence should cause no alarm if Dominion Status mentioned in your announcement had been used in the accepted sense. For has it not been admitted by responsible British statesman that Dominion Status is virtual Independence." Was it then that the contradiction between 'Dominion Status' and 'Independence' was of the same order as that of tweedledum and tweedledee? The political import of the two concepts stands apart and to strike an equation in the arena of political struggles not only tend to create confusion but make for division in the main stream of action, ending in a dichotomy of objective to be achieved and method to be employed in fulfilling these objectives. Gandhiji used such substitutes for complete independence as 'Substance of Independence' or 'Purna Swaraj', all of which were delightfully vague and ended in sharpened differences of objectives and methods till the dichotomy was cut asunder in two distinct parts.

Nineteen thirty-three was also a turning point. Mahatma Gandhi had gone on fast in September 1932 and again in May 1933, for different reasons. The civil disobedience movement was suspended and later on withdrawn in 1934 when Congress decided to enter the legislatures. The

charm between the Gandhian leadership and the militant radicals within the Congress widened. Subhas Chandra Bose issued a statement in May 1933 from Vienna, along with V. J. Patel, where both of them were undergoing treatment at that time, that the Congress should be radically recognised on a new principle and with a new method, the form of non-cooperation will have to be changed into a more militant one and for reorganisation, leadership should be changed, if necessary.

In the same year, his presidential speech in the 'Indian Political Conference' held in London on 10 June 1933, was read out in his absence. In his address, he worked out the 'Technique of Revolution' led by a disciplined militant army as distinct from non-violent 'Satyagraha' collective or individual. In his address, Subhas Chandra Bose pointedly posed two questions of vital and immediate concern to the national struggle which was being waged under the leadership of the Congress. These questions and answers thereto would give an insight into the working of the mind of the future leaders of Indian revolution, who waged an armed struggle against the enemies of India's freedom in East Asia. The questions, related to each other, are:

"(1) with regard to our goal: Is a compromise between England and India ultimately possible?

(2) with regard to our method: Can India win political freedom by following the path of periodical compromise and without adopting the uncompromisingly militant plan of action?"

The answers Subhas Chandra Bose had provided in the same address were also illuminating enough to be quoted as these have a direct bearing on objective and method he would soon embark upon as founder of the militant revolution 'Forward Bloc'. He had unambiguously stated:

"The social, economic and political forces working within India are such that no peace is possible between India and Britain till her legitimate aspirations are fulfilled. The only solution of the present deadlock that is possible is through the attainment of India's freedom. This implies the defeat of the British Government of India..."

He went on to say that with regard to "the question of the method we would adopt—I may say that the country has rejected the path of periodical compromise...In determining our future policy and plan, we should rule out, once for all, the prospect of periodical compromises"

In this presidential address at the London Political Conference, Subhas Chandra Bose dwelt on the whole gamut of the phases of revolutionary struggle, the objective, the method and in a broader sense the technique, the instrument of struggle leading to seizure of power. Here he did not postulate "seizure of power by force of arms," "because the Congress was pledged to non-violence". He had also dwelt on the post-seizure of power situation in this draft scheme of technique of revolution. He was found engrossed with the scheme of a new party of

determined men and women of "freedom intoxicated", "morally prepared" "men and women", "prepared to undergo maximum sacrifice and suffering." Finally, according to Subhas Chandra Bose's ideological conception, "The new party will have to play the role of the fighters and leaders in the 'National' campaign against Great Britain and also the role of the architects of new India, who will be called upon to undertake the work of post-war social reconstruction."

The dichotomy had struck deeper and deeper roots within the instrument of struggle for India's Independence. This undoubtedly had arisen out of the ideological imperatives thrown up by the struggle and its attendant methods which was patently evident in the Calcutta Congress. The Congress was divided, one portion confronting the other on either side of the barricade. Severance of British connection, as a qualitative description of the character of 'Independence' lent an air of relentless and uncompromising struggle without any respite till the 'British connection' was totally cut asunder. Gandhian method of struggle alternated between phases of Satyagraha followed by phases of compromise, which we have earlier described as a sort of struggle-unity-struggle syndrome. During the days of post-non-cooperation movement, those who were against Council-entry were No-changers led by Gandhiji and those for it were pro-changers. Pro-Changers known as Swarajists led by C.R. Das and Motilal Nehru, though defeated at Gaya Congress in 1922 returned to the charge in September 1923 in Delhi where their policy of Council-entry to wreck from within was accepted, though the 'immediate' objective was laid down by them as Dominion Status for India,

But between 1922 and 1928, India had travelled to an extent that the objective of Dominion Status had been replaced by that of complete independence. By the logic of history, the Progressives of yesterday had made room for the Radicals of today.

Between 1933 and 1936, Subhas Chandra Bose was in Europe most of the time and excepting Soviet Russia he had occasions to visit many countries in the Continent wherefrom he could gather materials to forge the strategy of Indian revolution for which preparations were afoot. He met President Benes of Czechoslovakia and President De Valera, among others, two of the outstanding leaders of national revolution in their respective countries. He made an intimate and in-depth study of Mustafa Kamal Pasha of Turkey. However varied the conditions of this country might have been from Indian conditions, there was much to learn from the methods of struggle which they had applied to achieve independence. Such knowledge added to the hiatus that was developing between Gandhian technique and revolutionary technique, which were still adhering to peaceful and legitimate means.

The revolutionary forces who believed in armed struggle and could lay down their lives for the attainment of freedom in their pursuit had all

the sympathy, admiration and respect for Subhas Chandra Bose. This revolutionary force bore the brunt of ruthless attack by the rulers who were bent upon their elimination from our body politic. Although numerically they were of no moment to the powers—that be—, but morally they acted as a tremendous force in reshaping the 'Method' or restructuring the 'objective' of the struggle for independence.

There were widespread outbursts of this revolutionary force in Bengal, Bihar, U.P. and the Punjab. By the opening years of thirties, the militant action of these forces matched to a considerable extent the murderous assault of the police and the army on them.

The revolutionary struggle was sharpened by another force to an extent and for a while. The CSP was formed in 1934 as the Socialist Party of India, commensurate with the requirements of the national revolution. Between 1934 and 1938, it belied the hope of those who thought it would form a rallying ground of 'all the radical and progressive elements in the Congress'. As Subhas Chandra Bose has observed : "The mistake of C.S. Party was that it talked too much about socialism, which was after all a thing of the future. India's future requirements were an uncompromising struggle with British imperialism and methods of struggle more effective than Mahatma Gandhi had produced." A potential alternative to the Congress mainstream could not come into play to its fullest extent. But it is quite in order to suggest that the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) arose as a reaction to the return to parliamentarianism.

By a quick of fate, the opponents of Council-entry in 1922 were turned into proponents of Council-entry in 1934. The dynamic revolutionary fervour of the Congress was on the wane as the Gandhian wing of the Congress slowly settled down to the path of constitutionalism from 1934 onwards and for that matter of parliamentary politics.

The unanimous election of Subhas Chandra Bose in January 1938 as President of the Haripura Session of the Congress came as a surprise to many. That Gandhiji should pick out one of his irrepressible opponents both in point of ideology and method caused many an eyebrow to be raised. Perhaps it was gambit to checkmate Subhas Chandra Bose's unrivalled militancy in the struggle for freedom or it might be a last attempt to win him over to the path of moderation which worked with Jawaharlal Nehru after he was elevated by Gandhiji to this office at the Lahore Congress session. Even though the war was yet to overtake the world, Gandhiji might have thought of taking time by the forelook and start the process of healing up the dichotomy in the objective and method of struggle against the British rulers which had been widening with the passage of time. No sooner had it been raised, than such hope was dashed to the ground before the year was out.

The Haripura address of Subhas Chandra Bose presents him in bold



relief, both in point of clarity and perspicacity. The in-built declaration of resistance persuasively clothed in the Haripura Congress address forwarded the country of the emergency of an unrelenting crusade against any attempt at compromising the fundamentals inherent in the concept of freedom of the country. This way the national struggle would give birth to a left-wing in the true sense of the term.

Some excerpts of the Haripura Presidential address would draw up an image of the leader of the left-wing crusader animated by the sole objective of converting the entire nation to his point of view and maintaining the totality of structure. Therein, he states :

- (1) "I am one of those who think in terms of a free India—who visualise a national Government in this country within the brief open span of our own life."
- (2) "If after the capture of political power, national reconstruction takes place on socialistic lines—as I have no doubt it will, it is the 'Have-nots', who will benefit at the expense of the 'Haves' and the Indian masses have to be classified among the 'Have-nots'."
- (3) "The duty of the future national Government will be . . . to set up a commission for drawing up a comprehensive plan of reconstruction."

Having regard to the "divide and rule" policy of the imperialist rulers, Subhas Chandra Bose foresaw their game and warned that if perchance the scheme of Federation, which was an embodiment of 'divide and rule policy' failed, "British ingenuity will seek some other constitutional device for partitioning India and thereby neutralising the transference of Power to the Indian people".

These postulates were the forerunner that raged between the Gandhian wing and the extremist left-wing before 'Forward Bloc' arose out of the Congress as 'historical necessity' and after it was formed in May 1939.

The 'anschlues' of Austria with Germany forcibly accomplished by the march of Hitler's Army on 14 March 1938, though patched up in clumsy four-power pact, was the signal of the impending war in Europe. Subhas Chandra Bose as President of the Congress began an open propaganda throughout India in order to prepare the Indian people for a national struggle, which should synchronise with the coming war in Europe.

After the Munich Pact in September 1938, President Bose "for the first time realised that in the event of an international crisis, Gandhiji would not seize the opportunity for attacking the British Government".

The stage was, therefore, set for the ensuing battle royal between the two sets of combatants in the Tripuri presidential election in January

1939. Subhas Chandra Bose sought to raise the impending election from the level of a contest of personalities to that of a tussle between opposing principles represented by the contestants. Bose's rival, Pattabhi Sitaramayya's ground for the contest boiled down to his opposition to the two consecutive terms of his rival, except under extraordinary circumstances. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and his six other colleagues in the Working Committee were of the opinion that presidents did not lay down policy and programmes: "The position of the President is that of a Chairman" and the President symbolised the "unity and solidarity of the nation". Jawaharlal Nehru was of the opinion that "Subhas Babu should not stand" and he wondered "What programmes are at stake in this election?" But Subhas Chandra Bose went directly into the pith of the matter and unerringly assessed that the issues were not a personal one. "The progressive sharpening of the anti-imperialist struggle has given birth to new ideas, ideologies, problems and programmes." The contest went in favour of Subhas Chandra Bose by 1580 to 1377 votes in the teeth of stubborn opposition from Gandhiji. Gandhiji made no bones about it. After the electoral results came out, he owned it up without any equivocation and unlike Patel, Nehru and others, he ascribed his difference with Bose more to 'principles and policy' than to anything else. The Tripuri election campaign of Subhas Chandra Bose raised the ideological tussle between the two camps to a fever heat. In the ultimate analysis, the tussle between the two camps was narrowed down to the planks of unswerving opposition to the proposed Federation and uncompromising struggle for independence. Subhas Chandra Bose's victory was a pyrrhic one as by the Pant Resolution of the Tripuri Congress, moved by the U.P. leader bearing that name, bound down the President to form the Working Committee, "according to the wishes of Mahatma Gandhi". The controversy between Gandhi and Subhas raged for three months through correspondence but long-distance negotiations broke down on the issue of 'Homogenous' versus 'Composite' cabinet. *Prima facie*, it might have appeared to be a difference of political viewpoints or opinions. But deeper down it was a fundamental difference of two frames of reference in regard to the way of life.

The two concepts could not be accommodated with each other. Subhas Chandra Bose, therefore, could do no better than tender his resignation as President of the Congress in the meeting of the AICC held at Wellington Square, Calcutta on 29 April 1939. Within three days of his resignation as President of the Congress on 29 April 1939, Subhas Chandra Bose went ahead with the formation of a radical and progressive party with the objective of consolidating the left force under one umbrella. 'Forward Bloc' thus came into existence on 3 May 1939, as a party 'within the Congress' with Subhas Chandra Bose as the President. The emergence of left-wing radicals as a separate entity was on the cards

ever since the Munich crisis in September 1938. Apart from the internal contradictions, which had loomed large between Gandhian leadership and the alternative leadership of Subhas Chandra Bose with his accent on severance of British connection, his progressive accent on capture of power and his programme of bracing up the country for the final struggle with an ultimatum to the British Government in this regard, left no room for a compromise in the inner struggle within the Congress which had slowly but inexorably taken shape round the ideology and method of Mahatma Gandhi and Subhas Chandra Bose, respectively.

The genesis of this difference may as well be traced to the Mani Bhavan meeting of the two when they met for the first time on 1 July 1921, at Bombay immediately after Subhas Chandra Bose had arrived there from London on his resigning from the Indian Civil Service (ICS).

### **Left Consolidation**

As Subhas Chandra Bose has rightly said : "For bringing about left consolidation, the Forward Bloc was born in May 1939 . . ." After his disappearance from his Calcutta house on the night of 16-17 January 1941, he wrote a book on *Forward Bloc—Its Justification*, which is a unique historical document giving details of genesis of Forward Block by its founder himself.

The leftists within the Congress, during those days, comprised members of the Congress Socialist Party, the Radical League of M.N. Roy, the National Front of the Communists, and, of course, Forward Bloc. The initial idea of the Forward Bloc was to rally all the leftist elements within the compass of one party. But such extent parties would not liquidate themselves to merge into one party, effectuating left consolidation. The founder of the Forward Bloc had this process of an umbrella-Party in mind when the formation of the party became a reality. As the coalescence of identities of these parties was not found a practicable proposition, the founder concentrated on the concept of a bloc of the left parties. But even then, it could be seen later on that there were no takers of this proposition and the entire exercise of left consolidation was reduced to the formation of a committee named 'Left Consolidation Committee'.

It might be recalled that after the emergence of Forward Bloc, the issue of Federation had slowly been relegated to the background because of the developing war crisis. This development had brought to bear a severe compulsion of the disparate leftist parties to bring them under the banner of the left Consolidation Committee formed on 22 June 1939. This Committee came to be looked upon as the sharpest weapon of anti-imperialism. The consolidation of the 'Left' was undoubtedly an anti-thetical process to the massive consolidation of the 'Right' under the Gandhian leadership. The dynamics of change from the 'Right' to 'Left'

was manifestation of the Triadic conflict of 'Thesis-Anti-thesis-Synthesis' inhering in the Hegalian Dialectical logic adumbrated by Subhas Chandra Bose as the philosophy of charge.

In the then context, Leftism meant anti-imperialism *par excellence*, and after the attainment of independence, Leftism and reconstruction of national life on a socialist basis would be co-terminus. The import of leftism was thus given a new turn and gave Forward Bloc a new dimension as the spearhead of the struggle. The premise of unity in the formation of a strong consolidation entities with shades of differences has, more often than not, proved to be a negation of unity. After, all it had to be admitted that there was substratum of difference between unity and that mere mounting of unity did not make for it. In that, even unity remained a mere catchword having emotive appeal and exuding self-righteous satisfaction for having done an effort at unity. Therefore, unity and historically contemplated two sets of situations of opposing pulls, viz., 'unity of action' and 'unity of inaction'. 'Unity of inaction' is an exercise in futility, a deceptive contrivance for perpetuating status quoism had applying a gear to check process of change or progress while posing as champion of the same. Unity of action is a mechanism of dynamic change without operation of any inhibiting factor. That identity of principles and policy of ideology should have been the singular motive force of those who stood for 'revolutionary change was borne out by history at different times.

In raging debate between Lenin and Trotsky in 1910, during the days of reaction among the Bolsheviks, Lenin raised the issue of unity round principles, while Trotsky was keen on unity of socialist factions among them. Lenin dubbed Trotsky's unity more "Match-Makership". Subhas Chandra Bose was well aware of this lurking danger of this unity of inaction masquerading as real unity of action like a maelstrom and kaleidoscopic changes were packed within a brief span of time. Acting under tremendous pressures, the different entities, who came together with no identical policies and programmes in the Left Consolidation Committee, were out asunder and the Consolidation was set at naught. The threat of disciplinary action was held out against the Left Consolidation Committee by Congress President Rajendra Prasad that if an all-India Day was observed by them on 9 July 1939 to protest against some decisions of the Bombay meeting of the AICC held earlier materialised. M.N. Roy and his Radical League had left the Committee and dissociated with the observance of the day even before 9 July had come. In October, the Congress Socialists followed suit, on the plea that in future they would act on their own and would not follow directives of the Committee. The last fragment of the Committee, the National Front, was forced to leave the Committee in December 1939 on ground of bad faith as alleged by the Forward Bloc. Defiance by Subhas Chandra Bose of

Congress President's directive on 9 July observance attracted Subhas Chandra Bose's disqualification for the Presidentship of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee and debarred him from an elective post for three years from August 1939. Left consolidation suffered a severe setback in the progressive disintegration of the Consolidation Committee, leaving Forward Bloc alone to plough its lonely furrow. But the onslaught on the Left had visited on the Forward Block to the fullest measure.

The founder of the Forward Bloc recounted what Forward Bloc 'Stood for' on the eve of his escape to Berlin from Kabul in March 1941, and framed the following objectives as forming an integral part of the emerging history of the Forward Block :

1. Complete National Independence and uncompromising, anti-imperialist struggle for attaining it ;
2. A thoroughly modern and Socialist State ;
3. Scientific large-scale production for the economic regeneration of the country ;
4. Social ownership and control of both production and distribution;
5. Freedom for the individual in the matter of religious worship ;
6. Equal rights for every individual ;
7. Linguistic and cultural autonomy for all sections of the Indian community ; and
8. Application of principles of equality and social justice in building up new order in Free India.

The Founder did not fail to emphasise that Forward Bloc did not go by 'Copy book maxim of test book of Politics or Economics'. It would seek to serve not only the case of India but "of humanity and human progress as well".

### **The Constitution and the Programme**

The first conference of the All-India Forward Bloc held at Bombay on 22 June 1939, adopted a constitution and a programme of the Forward Bloc. The constitution provided for the following :

- (a) This organisation shall be called the Forward Bloc.
- (b) The Forward Bloc is a organisation within the Indian National Congress, which is to serve as an common platform for all the leftist elements inside the Congress.
- (c) The aim of the Bloc is the same as that of the Indian National Congress, i.e., "the attainment of complete independence by all legitimate and peaceful means".
- (d) Membership of the Bloc is open to all primary members of the Congress, who subscribe to the programme of the Bloc.
- (e) The All-India Council of the Forward Bloc is open to all

primary members of the AICC who subscribe to the programme of the Bloc. They will have the right to co-opt additional members not exceeding one-third of the total strength of the Council.

- (f) The Provincial, District and other subordinate Councils of the Bloc shall consist of members of Provincial, District and other subordinate Congress Committees respectively, who subscribe to the programme of the Bloc.
- (g) The All-India Council will elect the following office-bearers:
  - one President ;
  - two Vice-Presidents ;
  - one General-Secretary ;
  - four Secretaries ; and
  - one Treasurer.
- (h) The Councils, excluding the All-India Council, may function as the executive of the Bloc or may elect small working committees from amongst their members.
- (i) The All-India Council may take such steps as may be necessary in order to bring about co-ordination between the Bloc and any left group or groups in the Congress that may not join the Bloc for the present. Such co-ordination should aim at complete consolidation and unity of all left elements and groups in the Congress.
- (j) The register of primary members shall be scrutinised by a sub-committee of the province, which shall have authority to correct the list, and exclude names of undesirable persons. The decision of the sub-committee will be subject to appeal to the All-India Committee.

### **The Programme**

The Forward Bloc will endeavour to implement the following programme to the best of its ability and will, at the same time, carry on propaganda in its favour, with a view to having it adopted by the Indian National Congress.

1. While every Indian should have full freedom of religious worship, religion and mysticism should not dominate politics or political affairs. Political affairs should be guided by political, economic and scientific considerations alone.

2. Strenuous efforts should be made to fight provincialism and communalism, which have been accentuated since the inauguration of provincial autonomy.

3. Any corruption that may exist today among Congressmen—whether it be the result of an attempt to capture the Congress machinery or whether it has appeared in the wake of office acceptance should be

rooted out.

4. The Congress should be freed from the influence of the vested interests and from the domination of the Congress Ministries. Democracy should be restored within the Congress and should replace the present authoritarian tendency. Simultaneously, the Congress organisations throughout the country should be radicalised and activated.

5. The parliamentary programme of the Congress should be implemented more vigorously and with a radical, revolutionary mentality. The Congress Ministries should function not under the aegis of the British Government but of the Congress. Congress Ministries as well as the Congress organisation in the country should set before themselves the objective of developing a parallel Government in the country.

6. The struggle of the peasants and the workers for their economic emancipation should be actively supported.

7. There should be close co-ordination between the Congress on the one side and other anti-imperialist organisations like Kisan Sabhas, trade unions, youth leagues, students' federations, etc.

8. A Volunteer Corps should be organised on an All-India basis.

9. The Congress should actively help the States' people in their struggle for responsible Government and civil liberty. Close co-ordination and collaboration should be developed between the Congress and the States' people organisations with a view to making the States' people's organisations an integral part of the Indian National Congress. There should be a comprehensive plan for helping and guiding the States People's movement throughout the country.

10. Uncompromising hostility should be offered to the federal scheme and it should be combated by all peaceful and legitimate means, should the British Government endeavour to foist the federal scheme on the Indian people.

11. All attempts should be made to prevent India being dragged into an imperialist war by Great Britain and to prevent Indian resources in men and money from being utilised and exploited in the interests of British imperialism.

12. The boycott of British goods and of foreign cloth should be intensified once again. This is necessary not only to help *swadeshi* industries in India and the workers engaged in those industries but also to thwart the war preparations of British imperialists.

13. Provisions should be made for the proper training of political workers.

14. Steps should be taken from now to prepare the country for an early resumption of the national struggle for complete independence.

15. In the realm of national reconstruction, the Forward Bloc will stand for the idea of planning for India and in particular of industrial planning. When the time and opportunity arrive, the Bloc will stand

for industrial development through the medium of the State. The Bloc will also advocate a progressive land policy which will be determined after consultation with other anti-imperialist organisation.

### **Constitution and Programme in Action**

It is indeed paradoxical that at a time when the Indian National Congress had assumed office in seven provinces, later extended to eight, after the elections were held under the 1935 Constitutional Act, Subhas Chandra Bose, the foremost exponent of anti-compromising struggle against the Imperialist rulers should have been called upon to preside over the destiny of the Indian National Congress. Ministry-running had its own logic, because in no time it drives the administrative structure into a constitutional rut which is shorn of the revolutionary urge for social change. But Ministry-running during Bose's first term as President was of a different hue. The Haripura Congress Programmes had enough of built-in revolutionary fervour to break new grounds of creative-constructive efforts.

The incipient conflict between the Revolutionary and Reformist way of conducting the affairs of the nation gradually heightened climaxing in Tripuri and Post-Tripuri events. The texture of the Congress had undergone a rapid transformation—opposing forces had developed within it comprising old 'leadership' and challenge of new factors and forces. Forward Bloc symbolised these new factors and forces.

The widening of the base of the Congress to encompass within its fold the Indian masses, irrespective of religion was the call of uncompromising struggle for freedom. The United Front of anti-imperialist forces had, therefore, rightly been the battle-cry. It was also quite in order that post-struggle reconstruction on Socialist lines should have been correlated into a whole as the strategy of the battle.

The Constitution of the Forward Bloc and the attendant programme drawn up in its first All-India Conference at Bombay on 22 June 1933 should have been comprised of provisions towards the fulfilment of these objectives.

The Constitution of the Forward Bloc gave the lie to all those who were out to slander it. Subhas Chandra Bose in a signed editorial in the weekly *Forward Bloc*, captioned "Our Critics" on 19 August 1939, in reply to uninformed and/or malicious critics of the Forward Bloc, *inter alia* said:

"... in the earlier stages, it was urged that the birth of the Forward Bloc was due to personal factors and factional differences—that the Bloc did not have a positive programme . . . wanted to set up a new organisation within the Congress in order to create an unnecessary split. . ."

The provisions of the constitution and the programme of the Forward Bloc virtually silenced the authors of such slander on the content,



structure and objective of the new party. The charges of disruption and scheming against the Congress was forcefully rebutted by the spirited reply of Subhas Chandra Bose to the disciplinary action taken on him for violation of the 9th July ban by President Rajendra Prasad against observance of the Day. In his reply on 19 August 1939, he invoked his countrymen: "Come and join the Congress in their millions and enlist as members of the Forward Bloc. Only by doing so shall we be able to convert the rank and file in the Congress to our point of view, secure a reversal of the present policy of constitutionalism and reformism and resume the national struggle for independence with the united strength of the Indian people."

The constitution and programme of the Forward Bloc had been so inscribed in all its essential details that it left no room for doubt in assessing them a lending sharpness to it and that its location within the Congress was an irrefutable fact. Further, as an instrument of struggle, the Forward Bloc unfalteringly stood for "attainment of complete independence by all legitimate peaceful means".

In his Haripura address, Subhas Chandra Bose redefined the means of attaining independence. He said: "Satyagraha, as I understand it, is not mere passive resistance but active resistance as well". The locus of attention of struggle was "severance of the British Connection". Therefore, sharpening of 'active resistance, will necessarily follow which would contemplate a qualitatively different situation than what had been created by Struggle-compromise-struggle circuit.

Provisions were also made in the constitution for "co-ordination between the Bloc and any left group or groups in the Congress that may not join the Bloc for the present". This provision was deftly inscribed in view of the inter-party relations of the left forces in the country and covered the different stages of the formation of the Left Consolidation Committee, later on undertaken by Subhas Chandra Bose.

Regarding the question of forming a party of left within the Congress, Subhas Chandra Bose dwelt with it at length in his Haripura address. Among other things, he said in his address about this issues, the following is the forerunner of his inclusion of it in the Programme of the Forward Bloc. He observed:

"In the first place, it is desirable for the leftist elements to be consolidated into one party. Secondly, a leftist bloc can have a *raison d'être* only if it is socialist in character. There are friends who object to such bloc being called a party, but to my mind it is quite immaterial whether you call that bloc a group, league or party. Within the limits prescribed by the constitution of the Indian National Congress, it is quite possible for a leftist block to have a socialist programme."

The involvement of peasants and workers in the struggle for economic emancipation and the United Front of Kisan, Trade Union, Youth and

Students' organisations drawing all social categories in the anti-imperialist struggle was a solemn warning of the grim struggle for national and social revolutions ahead, according to Forward Bloc's reckoning. Here again in his Haripura address, Subhas Chandra Bose had dealt with the problem of the relationship of such mass organisations like Trade unions, Kisan Sabhas with the Indian National Congress. He had opined that these mass organisations would work in cooperation with the Congress which was "the organ of mass struggle for capturing political power. While these others would primarily with the economic grievances of the workers and peasants treat the Congress as a common platform for all those who strive for the political emancipation of their country.

While Subhas Chandra Bose was not averse to the grant of affiliation to Kisan and trade union organisations, he was aware of its handicaps, which he expressed in the following words:

"... We should not forget that there is the possibility that the former may not have a radical outlook if their immediate economic grievances are not involved. In any case, quite apart from the question of collective affiliation, there should be closest cooperation between the national Congress and other anti-imperialist organisations. . ."

Last but not the least, by providing for complete integration of the States' people's struggle for self-government with India's struggle for independence in its programme, the Forward Bloc opened up a new vista of the struggle for freedom. It was, as it were, a call to the people of India, be it in the native states or in the provinces, to rally round under the banner of Indian National Congress to wage a relentless war for national liberation and thereafter for economic emancipation. Succinctly stated, as India was indivisible so was the Congress and its struggle against the British rulers, both on behalf of the so-called British India and the Indian States. This was one of the most epigrammatic exhortations of Subhas Chandra Bose during his countless packed meetings when he toured throughout the length and breadth of the country to organise Forward Bloc after its formation.

"The objective of developing a parallel Government in the country", as inscribed in clause 5 of the programme adopted by the Forward Bloc conference, was of immense revolutionary import. The technique of revolutionary strategy was first brought to point focus on 31 December 1929, when Subhas Chandra Bose moved his famous amendment to the main resolution on Independence at the Lahore session of the Indian National Congress. The mover of the resolution was Mahatma Gandhi himself and in moving his amendment Subhas Chandra Bose proceeded to say, "my cordial and hearty thanks and my gratitude to Mahatma Gandhi for coming forward to move a resolution which clearly says that Swaraj shall henceforth mean complete independence. . . ."

The gap between mooted the objective of complete independence

with severance of British connection and initiating a campaign to bring it to pass within a year should be matched by the corresponding revolutionary technique of developing a parallel Government in India to overthrow British imperialism according to the programme of Forward Bloc. This technique was daring in its conception and had to be bolder still in its execution. Subhas Chandra Bose was to wait for ten years till June 1939 when after the formation of Forward Bloc in May 1939, its first annual conference adopted the programme of parallel Government. The Sinn Fein movement in Ireland had a profound impact on Subhas Chandra Bose. That the concept of parallel Government, which had taken a firm root in his mind, originated from the Sinn Feiners' technique of parallel Government, in their fight against British rulers, was quite evident. In his Lahore speech, which has already been quoted, Subhas Chandra Bose continued:

"I shall only remind you about the example of Sinn Feiners in Ireland, who, when confronted with a situation similar to ours in this country, began their fight by setting up a parallel Government in their country. . . "

Historically speaking, the technique of parallel Government, which Subhas Chandra Bose propounded at Lahore in 1929 and later on adopted by the Forward Bloc in 1939, found its consummation in the formation of the provisional Government of Free India by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose on 21 October 1943, in South East Asia.

In the programme of the Forward Bloc, the pride of place has been given to the provision. "Full freedom of religious worship" and "political affairs should be guided by political, economic and scientific considerations alone" and that "strenuous efforts to be made to fight provincialism and communalism". . .

In his Haripura presidential address, Subhas Chandra Bose had covered all these grounds of minorities inclusive of Muslims, in a detailed manner from the standpoint of the totality of Indians. His unerring frame of constant reference to judge the correctness or otherwise of any solution in regard to any of these problems was whether it was "consistent, with the fundamental principles of nationalism," He continued to say: "Only by emphasising common interests, economic and political, can we cut across communal divisions and dissensions. . . . A policy of 'live and let live' in matters religious and understanding in matters economic and political should be our objective." His undying loyalty to these principles earned for him the endorsement of the members of the Muslim community, perhaps more than anybody else. It was because of the confidence they reposed in him that the Muslims with near-unanimity supported him at Tripuri. During his organisational tours of India, in the formative period of the Forward Bloc, Muslims, who were already moving away from the Congress, were found rallying round the Forward Bloc.

### Organisation in the Making

The founder of the Forward Bloc set out on a hurricane tour, so to say, throughout "practically the whole of British India" of those days and incidentally through a number of the Indian States. The tour was undertaken since the formation of the Forward Bloc in May 1939 and went well into August 1939, galvanising the entire country with revolutionary message of Forward Bloc. The tour had confirmed him that the formation of the Forward Bloc stood justified and that it had a "historical role."

However, Subhas Chandra Bose could see that in most of the places he had occasion to tour, the reaction of the Congressmen ranged from neutrality to open hostility. He wrote, for instance, in an article under the caption "Glimpses of My Tour (1)" in his weekly *Forward Bloc* of 28 October 1939: "In Andhra and Tamil Nadu an appeal was made by the presidents of the two provincial Congress Committees asking people to boycott me." Such covert propaganda, calumny "in the most malicious and unabashed manner" was carried on. He was openly proclaimed a 'rebel' against the Congress after the 9th July violation of ban. There were other forms of propaganda also, viz., that he had "joined the Muslim League".

But 'the tour was like a triumphal march'. As he moved from province to province, it were all surprises. It was "really difficult to say which province gave us the most enthusiastic reception", he said. He had observed that by his resignation he had succeeded eminently, "to rallying public opinion to an unimaginable degree". "Bengal, in particular, stood solidly behind us and there the Forward Bloc had the best start possible."

His first visit was to U.P. where receptions, especially in Unao and Kanpur, to Forward Bloc was very good. After U.P., it was the Punjab where a seething mass of humanity received him at Lahore. The founder "realised in a trice that Forward Bloc had caught the imagination of the masses," from the Punjab to the North-West Frontier Provinces, where the founder had been for the first time. In the N.W.F. Province, the Red Shirt volunteers could be found waiting at the stations with a huge crowd and at "Peshawar there was a right royal reception". Forward Bloc was inaugurated after discussions with the provincial Congress workers and with Mian Akbar Shah of Nowshera, "a doughty fighter and organiser."

"The rightist strongholds were Bombay, Madras and elsewhere," and they had to be stormed before one could speak of India as a whole.

So, the founder left Peshawar by the Frontier Mail for Bombay, where K.F. Nariman was in charge of the Forward Bloc.

Now the founder was marked down as "Rebel No. 1" by the Congress High Command. Bombay was the venue of the All-India For-

ward Bloc Conference, scheduled for 22 and 23 June 1939. He had come down to Bombay *via* Delhi, Jabalpur and other places en route where he was well received. The Bombay reception was not as glamorous as when he visited the city as Congress President, but it was enthusiastic and "altogether spontaneous". The public meeting at Azad Maidan was a "mammoth one". He wrote : "There was not the slightest doubt we had captured the imagination of the Bombay public."

The All-India Forward Bloc Conference was held at Cowasjee Jehangir Hall, which "was packed to overflowing." In Bombay, the relationship of Forward Bloc with the existing left parties and groups had to be tackled. Left parties did not agree to merge in one organisation by losing their identity, as had been noted earlier. Individual members of such parties were also not allowed to join Forward Bloc. Left Consolidation Committee was thereafter formed in Bombay with the units comprising the Congress Socialist Party, the National Front group, the Radical League and the Forward Bloc. It was also decided that the units would be co-equal and the Left Consolidation Committee would act only on the basis of unanimity of the units on any issue.

From Bombay to Poona, which was not a Gandhian stronghold, here Senapati P.M. Bapat, the veteran Maharashtarian leader, joined the Forward Bloc. From Maharashtra to Karanataka, where Dharwar was the destination, wayside receptions and short speeches continued throughout the night. In Karnataka, the major portion of the province was new to the founder. But the volume of mass support for Forward Bloc was an agreeable surprise. New forces and elements had come to the fore because of mass awakening. Acknowledged leaders like G.R. Deshpande were becoming out of place. The founder observed :

"Again and again throughout my all-India tour did I feel how rapidly the composition of the Congress was changing and new anti-imperialist forces were springing up and how quickly the political aspect of India was changing along with them."

From Dharwar to Belgaum that was the stretch of the tour. At Belgaum where there was "wild enthusiasm, S.K. Hosmani, MLA (Central), President of the Karnataka Provincial Congress Committee, presided over the meeting. He accepted the Presidentship of the Provincial Organising Committee of the Forward Bloc. Two other workers, Mandji, and Idgunji, were also enlisted. A warm and spontaneous reception awaited him at Ahmedabad, which was an acknowledged stronghold of the Rightists. His meetings were largely attended on his way to Nadiad where the Gujarat tour terminated. A Bombay report of 22 July 1939, gave this account of pleasant surprise. From Karnataka, the founder came back to Bombay *via* Poona and then went to Gujarat. In between he went to Bubbulpore for a while and "there was something like a rally of Forward Blocers from different districts of Mahakoshala". . . .

Earlier, he met newspaper correspondents at Kanpur on 18 May 1939, where he spoke of the progressive and revolutionary programme of the Forward Bloc and of raising all-India volunteer corps to harness all the revolutionary forces in the country. He also spoke of the confidence, which had been roused among the minorities in general and the Muslim in particular by the inauguration of the Forward Bloc. He found that the appeal of the Congress had sunk low in spite of Congress reassurances about them, annually in the Congress sessions.

In these meetings, earlier at the Sradhanand Park, Calcutta, and at Dacca (now in Bangladesh) on 5 June 1939, he had repeatedly reverted to the theme, 'What was Revolution?' This question arose because of the revolutionary character of the policy and programme of the Forward Bloc.

'Revolution' was indicative of fundamental change in the life of the community. It does not necessarily lead to bloodshed. He spoke of bloodless revolution all over the world. But when an aggressor seeks to usurp a country's freedom, blood is shed by the army of liberation of the country concerned, to resist the aggressor.

He then went on to explain that revolution is both creative and destructive. It is on the ruins of destruction, the revolutionary starts creating anew. To destroy the enemy, to build the country anew and then to defend the hard earned freedom against all aggression, that is how revolution is conceived. This was also the dream which actuated Subhas Chandra Bose to inaugurate the Forward Bloc, organise it and finally lead it to the battle for severance of British connection through the instrumentality of the Congress as long as he would not be forced to act otherwise.

### **War Breaks Out**

It was prophetic of Subhas Chandra Bose to have urged at Tripura Session of the Indian National Congress to present India's national demand for independence with a six-months' ultimatum to the British Government for a positive response. On the expiry of the ultimatum, the final all-out struggle would have begun. Although the resolution suffered defeat at the Tripura Congress and was thus rendered infructuous, the Second World War broke out just on the expiry of six months after Tripura session. Earlier in February of the same year, this "National Demand" Resolution was moved by Subhas Chandra Bose and seconded by Leela Roy in the Bengal Provincial Conference held at Jalpaiguri, which was presided over by Sarat Chandra Bose. The resolution was unanimously adopted in the provincial Conference and popularised throughout the country. The 'National Demand' with ultimatum had become the battle-cry within a short period to those who had been steeling themselves in their determination not only to be drawn into any

imperialist war by the British rulers but also to wage a last ditch struggle for the freedom of India.

Immediately after the commencement of World War II the Congress Working Committee on 8 September to 14 September where the founder of the Forward Bloc was also invited to attend though he had earlier been virtually expelled from the Congress. He strongly urged for resumption of struggle for independence forthwith, which was the logical sequel to the anti-war policy of the Congress. The Working Committee of the All-India Forward Bloc, when met in Calcutta in August 1939, had in its resolution "On War Preparation" said : "Forward Bloc will resist by all non-violent means any attempt on the part of the Government to exploit the resources of India in men, money and materials for war preparation." The Working Committee of the Congress ended its deliberations by calling upon the British Government to declare its 'war aims' and offered conditional cooperations.

In a signed editorial of weekly *Forward Bloc* of 26 August 1939, the Editor, Subhas Chandra Bose, had deftly summarised the respective positions of the Indian National Congress and the Forward Bloc prior to the declaration of war, succinctly, as follows :

"The Congress is pledged to war-resistance, though that resistance must necessarily be of a non-violent character. It is, therefore, not enough to say as the Working Committee has recently done, that *we shall not assist* British imperialism in a war-emergency. We have to go further and *reaffirm our resolve to non-violently resist* enforced participation in an imperialist war."

The Working Committee of the All-India Forward Bloc had subsequently met at Wardha on 8 September and subsequent days, and made the important decision of resumption of struggle, which the founder communicated to the Congress Working Committee at the Wardha meeting held at the same time.

The compulsive urge of not only to assist but to resist enforced participation in the imperialist war leading to propagation for resistance to war efforts led by the Forward Bloc, created tremendous pressure on the Congress leadership. The Congress Working Committee had, therefore, to decide on the resignation of its Ministries in eight provinces on 29 October 1939.

It was generally expected that the resignation of the Congress Ministers would be followed by a campaign of passive resistance or civil disobedience. But that did not come to pass. In vain people waited for events to follow. But the Forward Bloc was unrelenting in the twin campaign against the war efforts and for resumption of struggle for independence. In October an anti-imperialist conference was held at Nagpur, which was a great success.

The Working Committee of the All-India Forward Bloc met in

Calcutta on 24 November 1939, and the following days. Representatives of the Kisan Sabha and the National Front group attended on invitation. Swami Sahjananda Saraswati, General Secretary, All-India Kisan Sabha, also attended the meeting. The Working Committee strongly expressed itself to the effect that "the tactics of a national struggle demanded that the Congress Ministers should have given effect to the Haripura Congress resolution, while remaining in Office and should have faced dismissal in consequence thereof." That would have been resistance *par excellence* in practice worthy of militant non-violent struggle.

The Working Committee of the Forward Bloc tended to locate the cause of marking time by the Congress Working Committee after the resignation of the Congress Ministers to the apprehension that if a struggle was launched the leadership might pass into the hands of more militant and progressive groups or parties genuinely representative of the masses who will not compromise on the issue of Indian independence. The Working Committee of the Forward Bloc urged the Congress Working Committee to give positive lead for a struggle without delay, which would also mean the logical conclusion to the resignation of the Congress Ministers.

The resolution of the Working Committee of the All-India Forward Bloc further said: "This will clarify the present position and enable those people to act who are determined to go forward if the Congress Working Committee fails the country in this hour of supreme crisis.

Behind the trenchant criticism of the war resolution of the Allahabad Session of the Congress Working Committee held prior to the Calcutta session of the All India Forward Bloc on 24 November 1939, there was an upspelt effort on the part of the Forward Bloc to avoid a split in the Congress between the 'Leftists' within, represented by the Forward Bloc, and the majority led by the Gandhians. The Congress had to be kept undivided to the extent possible till such time as the Congress would contemplate to offer resistance to the war efforts and to resume national struggle in the name of the Congress. The signed Editorial of Subhas Chandra Bose on December 2, 1939, issue of the weekly *Forward Bloc* captioned "Our Working Committee" had, *inter alia*, very categorically expressed this aspect of the matter which ran as follows :

"The declared attitude of the Forward Bloc should not be construed as a threat or a challenge to the Congress Working Committee for it is not so. That is why it has also been repeatedly stated that the most desirable thing would be for the Congress Working Committee to move forward and have an undivided Congress behind itself."

But the limiting factor was the period of waiting, which would be required for the Congress to act. The struggle for National Demand did not brook any delay. But at the same time the struggle must not split the Congress. The December 2 signed Editorial of the *Forward Bloc*



weekly, referred to earlier, was categorical in this regard. Subhas Chandra Bose urged the "Congress Committee to move forward" but at the same time he had unequivocally stated therein that the Congress Working Committee should have "an undivided Congress behind itself".

That was the working of one aspect of the mind of the founder of the Forward Bloc at that point of time or more particularly when 1939 was drawing to a close. But simultaneously, his mind was working in a new direction. He would not wait on the pleasure of events to strike at the imperialist powers, lest it should create a split in the Congress. Therefore, he had set himself to the task of exploring a way out of the spell of enforced check on accelerating the tempo of struggle. He had raised the dilemma, which had been ploughing his mind, at that time, in the signed Editorial of 16 December issue of the weekly *Forward Bloc* under the caption "A Reminder". With consummate perspicacity, he had given subtle expression to the inner working of his mind at this point of time and with discernment one could read that he had been thinking of reconciling the two limiting positions of keeping the Congress undivided and of opening up newer dimension of the struggle for independence.

His arguments propounded in the Editorial "A Reminder" on 16 December 1939, eloquently spelled out the line he had been mentally hammering out and subsequent preparations to work it out. This was how his mind had been working at that time :

"The endeavour to convert the Congress majority will undoubtedly continue, and also the attempt to get the Congress launch a forward move. But what if they do not fructify at once ? Time and tide wait for no man and the world today is now advancing like a roaring contract. *In the present critical situation, the Forward Bloc must be prepared to launch a forward move* and to act in a dynamic way in the event of the Congress Working Committee holding back or staying its hands. We cannot afford to wait on the doorstep of Time for the day when we shall secure majority in the Congress or succeed in having a forward move adopted by the Congress itself. It sometimes happens in history that the vanguard had to act in advance of and perhaps in temporary isolation from the rest. Desperate situations need desperate remedies at times".

Subhas Chandra Bose was very much conscious of the criticisms which such a hypothetical postulate would invite. But an idealist though he was in the pursuit of reality, as a seeker of truth, in the fight for freedom he was a hard-boiled realist with his feet firmly placed on the Terra Firma. He had threadbare discussed the pros and cons of the step he had mooted and his arguments against breach of discipline, adventurist isolation from the main stream, rested on the classic dictum : "Freedom comes to those who dare and act." He cryptically observed at one place in the Editorial of 16 December, taking the worst view of

advance action and in isolation from the rest, that : "This may be an adventure of some sort—but not necessarily adventurism".

But he did not stop at that. He had raked up classical instances from history where actions had to be taken in isolation by some of the leaders of the struggle, which later on turned out to be prophetic, although they were leaps in the dark to start with. The instances of Lenin's adventure in April 1917, the Irish adventure of 1916 and such other heroic actions which prompted men of courage and conviction to take steps decisively in the cause of the country's freedom, irrespective of failure or success in the cause. It is on record that Subhas Chandra Bose, while Congress President after Haripura, had secret contacts with the German Consul of Bombay according to Secret Service Reports. This was communicated to Gandhiji through K.M. Munshi by the Government of India. The Secret Service Reports were said to have further indicated that it was so arranged between the two that in the event of war breaking out between Britain and Germany, the latter could depend on Subhas Chandra Bose's assistance. It was by September 1938, it could be seen that Gandhiji's attitude to Subhas Chandra Bose had cooled off. From then onward, complaints of stiffness in Gandhiji's attitude towards Subhas Chandra Bose was made and his consequent unrelenting opposition to Bose's candidature for the Tripura Presidential Election. To mark time, the Congress Working Committee had meanwhile proposed the convening of a Constituent Assembly within the framework of the imperialist Government. Subhas Chandra Bose was quick to come out with a rejoinder against the proposal for a spurious Assembly of men having no plenary powers from the people to convene a Constituent Assembly and frame a Sovereign *Constitution*.

In this signed Editorial captioned, "The Correct Line", in December 23, 1939 issue of *Forward Bloc*, he asserted that : "In our view a Constituent Assembly, if it is not a misnomer, can come into existence only after the seizure of power."

In the struggle for independence, a victorious India had to form a provisional national Government after the seizure of power from the British rulers which, in turn, would "summon a Constituent Assembly for framing a detailed Constitution for India. This Assembly which is now being proposed by the Congress Working Committee may be a glorified All-Party Conference, but it is certainly not a Constituent Assembly". In reality, such a Constituent Assembly would meet the fate of the Irish Convention, which had been convened by Lloyd George, Prime Minister of Great Britain, to call upon the Irish people to frame their own Constitution.

The Irish people were restive after the First World War, when the Sinn Feiners were fighting. The Sinn Fein leaders boycotted the Irish Convention and carried on their struggle. In consequence, the Irish

convention proved abortive and broke up. This analogy of revolutionary struggle with the working of a fake Constituent Assembly was calculated to rouse the revolutionary fire of Indian masses.

Such diversionary efforts could be scotched by the dynamic urge of massive struggles under the revolutionary leadership of the Indian masses in general and Kisan and workers in particular. Swami Sahajananda Saraswati led the Kisans in a massive way in the observance of 26 January 1940 as the Independence Day. By that time Government had started to release its pentup fury against the indomitable soldiers of freedom, who were working under the leadership of Forward Bloc. With the intensification of struggle against the rulers and the heightening of mass pressure on the Congress right, the valiant fighters of Forward Bloc had to fight on two fronts, viz., "alien imperialism" and "Indian counter-revolution", as it were, that was how Subhas Chandra Bose characterised the situation.

#### **Ramgarh Anti-Compromise Conference**

Ramgarh, in Bihar, the venue of the Anti-Compromise Conference convened by Subhas Chandra Bose on behalf of the Forward Bloc and Swami Sahajananda Saraswati, as the atmosphere was thick with rumours of talk of a compromise with the Government. Mahatma Gandhi was made the sole spokesman of the Congress to represent it for talks with the British Government, and C. Rajagopalachari, in his own way, was out to loosen the structure of the Congress organisation by raising issues which were inimical to the declared objectives of the Congress. As the signed Editorial of 13 January 1940 issue of *Forward Bloc*, the Editor wrote:

"The air is thick with rumours of a compromise with the Government. Some fancy that the endeavour to conclude a settlement will be made before the annual session of the Congress meets at Ramgarh in March next. Others opine...that the final attempt at a compromise will be made after March."

This assumption had gained currency because of setting up an ad-hoc provincial committee in Bengal by ousting the existing committee dominated by the radicals who were in a majority. If the rightful majority could be excluded from her contingent of 544 delegates at Ramgarh, inconvenience to the Gandhian leadership, could be eliminated. Ramgarh Congress Session would to that extent loose urgently to the Leftist Forward Blockist delegates. In spite of the solemn observance of the Independence Day on 26 January 1940, "to carry on the struggle till Purna Swaraj is attained, Rajagopalachari, an adept as a neutraliser of struggle, had started methods to strike a compromise. He was reported to have observed: "The goal of the Congress was something different from Dominion Status". Again he said: "Their goal should be independence of British Constitution. Dominion Status today might

be equivalent to complete freedom.”

This was how matters stood when the European war had reached its climax and thousands of Indians have undergone repressions and imprisonments in the final battle for freedom.

In the then pervading atmosphere of degeneration born out of reaction to the sense of an imminent compromise between the leaders of the Indian National Congress and the imperialist Government, the founder of the Forward Block took the lead along with other leaders of the left to convene an anti-Compromise Conference at Ramgarh on 18-19 March 1940. This was a major offensive contemplated and mobilised on a national basis to frustrate all the efforts at compromise. All Leftists and Leftist organisations in the country were given the call to muster strong at Ramgarh. The venue at Ramgarh for the anti-Compromise Conference on the proposed dates was fixed upon with an eye on the maximum mobilisation of radical forces. Because, the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha was organising a Kisan Sabha rally of about two lakhs of Kisans at Ramgarh at about the same time. With the Conference under preparation, Subhas Chandra Bose appealed to Mahatma Gandhi to lead the country as he did in 1920 and to stop his occasional peregrinations to the Viceregal Lodge.

The decision to hold the anti-Compromise Conference became inexorable after the Patna meeting of the Congress Working Committee held earlier. Brave words were spoken expressive of ‘Indian freedom, outside ‘the orbit of British imperialism or Dominion Status or any other status within the imperial structure’ were spelled out as also brave words that the people of India could ‘shape their own Constitution. . . through a Constituent Assembly elected on the basis of adult suffrage.’ These arguments had been repeated *ad nauseum* but during the interval of six months which had passed after the war broke out, the Congress Working Committee had always been changing their pledged anti-war policy of ten years duration—from 1927-1938—and there was no knowing how long they would wriggle for a way out. In essence during the six months after the war broke out the Congress policy had alternated between offer of Co-operation and threat of Civil Disobedience. But all the while Congress was eschewing this course of struggle on the issue of war. More often than not people of this way of thinking had sought to ward off the pressure against them with the plea that the Congress itself was the biggest anti-Compromise Conference and that separate Anti-Compromise Conference at Ramgarh would be redundant. It was self-deception to have thought in so facile a manner. In the context of the Patna resolution, Gandhiji came out with his own interpretation of the resolution and found that it was not incompatible with a possible compromise.

The Ramgarh Presidential address of Subhas Chandra Bose was an

illuminating and lucid exposition of the dynamics of challenge of a crisis and how to meet it. The crisis precipitated by an imperialist war on a country engaged in its struggle for freedom had to face the two-fold challenge of an enforced participation in the war and yielding to the bondage of an alien rule. The Ramgarh Anti-Compromise Conference was an answer to such a two-fold challenge. The leadership of the Indian National Congress had sought a short-cut to resolve the two-fold challenge to be yielding to a compromise covering both these aspects. A compromise was an anathema and had to be resisted at any cost. Ramgarh was born in the process, "to focus all the anti-imperialist forces in the country that are now determined to resist a compromise with imperialism". That was how Subhas Chandra Bose read the objective of the anti-Compromise Conference.

That the Patna resolution of the Congress Working Committee left loopholes detracting from its stance of struggle was stridently brought in the Ramgarh Presidential address of Subhas Chandra Bose. In his address at Ramgarh, Subhas Chandra Bose had forcefully pointed out that "No sooner had this resolution been passed than Mahatma Gandhi came forward with the statement that the door had not been banged on future negotiations for a settlement." The presidential address continued to say:

"The present age is the anti-imperialist phase of our movement. Our main task in this age is to end imperialism and win national independence for the Indian people. When freedom comes, the age of national reconstruction will commence and that will be the socialist phase of our movement".

That would be the dividing line between a Leftist, who will wage an uncompromising struggle with imperialism and those who will vacillate and "tend towards a compromise with it": Therefore, as the address contemplated: "In the next phase of our movement, Leftism will be synonymous with socialism—but in the present phase, the words "Leftist" and "anti-Imperialist" will be interchangeable". The Ramgarh Anti-Compromise Conference, once more in its main resolution, drew pointed attention to struggles on various issues that had been carried on since the war broke out. The Ramgarh Conference urged for intensification of existing local struggles and opening up new ones, wherever necessary. These local struggles had "to be linked up and pooled together to culminate in one common struggle for the achievement of India's independence".

The Ramgarh Conference finally settled on 6 April 1940, as the date for the inauguration of the 'National Week'. On this day the struggle would be launched which would be the signal for intensification of local struggles against India's forced participation in the war and to make the final effort to win independence. As the Ramgarh resolution said:

"Once this struggle begins, there should be no rest and no break, no Chauri Chaura as in 1921, and no Delhi Pact as in 1931. Nor should there be any side-tracking' of the struggle as happened in 1932 when the Harijan movement was launched."

The success of the Ramgarh Anti-Compromise Conference roused new interest in organisational solidarity and unity. The Government had let loose repression and vindictiveness on those who could face up to the challenge of British repression. In accordance with Ramgarh resolution, a campaign of civil disobedience was started during the 'National Week'—April 6 to April 13—throughout the country when a host of Forward Blocists were harassed, imprisoned and otherwise persecuted. Swami Sahajanda, the co-convenor of the Ramgarh Conference with Subhas Chandra Bose, was arrested on 20 April 1940 and sentenced to three years rigorous imprisonment, possibly to deter the Kisan strength from supporting the struggle.

Characteristically enough, the Ramgarh resolution spoke of "Freedom and Bread" underlining the necessity of economic freedom along with political freedom. This simple postulate spelled out eloquently the urgency of social revolution as an essential concomitant of political freedom. The relevant portion of the Ramgarh resolution reads as follows:

"We must rally all the anti imperialist, radical and progressive forces in the country under a common slogan, the slogan of 'Freedom and Bread' and resume our March towards the goal of liberty."

The All-India Working Committee of the Forward Bloc had a three-day session in Calcutta commencing from 20 May 1940 and took stock of the situation. Apart from Swami Sahajananda and Prof. N.G. Ranga, among those incarcerated in the preceding months, because of their pursuit of the policy of uncompromising struggle for independence, a number of leaders were arrested from the provinces of U.P., Maharashtra, Central Provinces, Andhra, Bihar and Bengal.

The Working Committee also took great care to urge on the issue of internal unity and consolidation in the context of the developing war crisis. The resolution underlined three aspects of the problem:

- (1) Urging all sections of Indian people to sink their differences ;
- (2) United demand of national liberty to be placed before Britain and the world; and
- (3) An appeal to the Indian people to settle Hindu-Muslim differences.

Unity had, therefore, assumed urgency at that stage of the national demand. Even long before the 'National Week' had commenced on 6 April 1940, violation of law had started in Bengal. It was Subhas

Chandra Bose who took the lead in addressing a meeting at the Shradddhananda Park, Calcutta, on 31 January 1940, in defiance of Ordinance, which had been promulgated prohibiting public meetings and demonstrations throughout the province of Bengal. After this defiance on 31 January 1940, the authorities did not seek to put down the movement of defiance by force. As Subhas Chandra Bose noted in the *Forward Bloc* Editorial of 1 June 1940: "From that day onward, the Ordinance was defied by the Provincial Congress Committee and its supporters all over Bengal. . ."

### **All Power to the Indian People': Dacca Conference Call**

This Provincial Congress Committee, as stated above, was the same as the post—9 July 1939, suspended Bengal Provincial Congress Committee led by Subhas Chandra Bose. This Committee continued to supply a fresh spurt to the movement of defiance of law. A special session of the Bengal Provincial Conference was held at Dacca on 25-26 May 1940. The Conference was manned by leaders and members of the Forward Bloc and it roused popular enthusiasm among all sections of the people.

As a signed Editorial of the *Forward Block* had noted in its issue of 1 June 1940, "The call for the intensification of the struggle and widening of the fighting-front".

The Conference "urged the people to cast off and demolish all emblems of political servitude, which militated against the newly awakened consciousness of Free India. The Holwell Monument in Calcutta ... must go."

In a word, the direction of the provincial Conference was "Struggle and Unite"—struggle against alien imperialism and unite among yourselves, if you want to win freedom and preserve it.

All this great and noble endeavour had to be made under the rallying cry "ALL POWER TO THE INDIAN PEOPLE".

It had happened that even long before Ramgarh, the other constituents of the left consolidation committee had parted company with the Forward Bloc. M.N. Roy with his Radical League was the first to leave and the 'National Front' of the Communist Party was the last to depart. Since then Subhas Chandra Bose had been thinking of shaping the Forward Bloc as a well-knit spearhead of the struggle against the imperialist and then to fashion it into an instrument of social transformation. In retrospect, it could be seen that long before he left India in disguise for an unknown destination, in January 1941, Subhas Chandra Bose while, leading the uncompromising struggle for 'National Demand', was planning "to raise up the struggle to a higher level and introduced a new phase in the fight by supplementing the movement inside the country with an invasion from outside by an Indian army of liberation." This

fact of planning was corroborated by Subhas Chandra Bose himself, after he had escaped from India to Berlin in April 1941 incognito and soon after gave a statement to the 'World Press'. Subhas Chandra Bose stated therein: "My plan of escape from India was not the product of one single brain. The whole scheme was discussed at length and after being decided upon, it was carefully planned in great detail."

### **Second Annual Conference of the Forward Bloc at Nagpur**

To forge the Forward Bloc as a well-knit party of anti-imperialist unity and struggle, the Second Annual Conference of the All-India Forward Bloc was convened on 18 and 19 June 1940 at Nagpur where it was resolved that henceforward the Forward Bloc would function as a party in the real sense of the term. The Nagpur resolution in this regard was as follows:

"In view of the unprecedented crisis, which has overtaken this country, the duties and responsibilities which have developed on the Forward Bloc have considerably increased. The Bloc can hope to discharge them satisfactorily only if it can develop sufficient cohesion and if it can function as a well-knit, disciplined organisation.

This conference, therefore, resolves that henceforth the Forward Bloc will function as a party. It will be a party within the Congress with a mass membership. The objective of the Forward Bloc will be the capture of political power by the Indian masses as early as possible and the reconstruction of India's national life on a socialistic basis. This Conference requests the All-India Working Committee to take necessary steps for perfecting the organisation of the Bloc."

On the 'political situation,' which was a part of the comprehensive resolution adopted at the Nagpur Conference of the All-India Forward Bloc voiced its differences with Mahatma Gandhi "in the division of the Indian people into Congress and non-Congress parties" and "... there should be, broadly speaking, two parties in the country, viz. those who are against British imperialism and those who are for it" and that "in the present crisis the Congress should regard itself as the trustee of the whole nation".

The slogan of "All Power to the Indian People", which was given at the Bengal Provincial Conference at Dacca in May last, was placed on an All-India basis at Nagpur for a guide of action of the All-India Forward Bloc.

The demand of the Nagpur Conference may be summed up as follows:

- (a) To intensify the struggle and widen it under the battle-cry: "All power to the Indian People".
- (b) Immediate transference of all power to the Indian people



- through a provisional national Government.
- (c) To work for Hindu-Muslim unity.
  - (d) Citizens' Defence Corps on a non-party basis to preserve internal unity and solidarity.

With the revolutionary battle-cry of "All Power to the Indian People" here and now, which was proclaimed by Subhas Chandra Bose at Nagpur and earlier at Dacca, he proceeded to plunge into a campaign against the Holwell Monument, which was a Dacca session's mandate of the Bengal Provincial Conference. The monument had to be removed in any event. It was "the symbol of our slavery and humiliation", a slur on the honour of Sirajudowla, the last independent Nawab of Bengal". The campaign had the support of all nationalists, irrespective of their religious persuasions. The campaign for its removal was to start on 2 July 1940 with Subhas Chandra Bose marching at the head of the first batch of campaigners.

Subhas Chandra Bose had just come back to Calcutta from an extensive tour. On his way back to Calcutta, he met Mahatma Gandhi, for the last time at Sevagram and made a final appeal to him to assume the leadership of the struggle. He was arrested at his Calcutta residence at noon on 2 July 1940, under the Defence of India Rules, without any warrant.

The next issue of the weekly *Forward Bloc* came out on 6 July 1940 with the Editorial Caption, "The Arrest", under the Editorship of his successor Mrs Leela Roy, a very close colleague in the uncompromising struggle for freedom and a pioneer revolutionary of Bengal.

Subhas Chandra Bose continued to be detained indefinitely under the Defence of India Act, but later on in August 1940, prosecution was launched against him for three of his speeches delivered in February 1940 and a contributed article in the weekly journal *Forward Bloc* in April 1940. During his incarceration in the Presidency Jail, Calcutta, he was evading appearance in the court for one reason or another. This would not continue indefinitely and he had to come out of jail as soon as possible, before his forced appearance in the court and possible conviction. The tenor of the thoughts crossing his mind during these days were amply expressed by his several radio speeches from Berlin after he had reached there in April 1941.

Before his sudden arrest, he was desperately trying to finalise the strategy but the process was cut short. He was, therefore, in desperate need of coming out of jail as soon as possible and then arrange to cross the border of India to seek a base of operation in some foreign country, sympathetic to his objective. Accordingly, he went on fast unto death on 29 November 1940 in the Presidency Jail, Calcutta, and threatened the Bengal Government to take his own life if there was any attempt to

forced feeding on 5 December 1940.

Thereafter, he was released on the same day and brought to his house at Elgin Road, Calcutta. He remained virtually confined to his room for about 40 days. During this period he surveyed the whole war-situation and came to the conclusion that Indian freedom fighters should have first-hand information as to what was happening and should join the fight against Britain and thereby contribute to the break-up of the British Empire. After considering the different means whereby this could be done, he found no other alternative but to travel abroad himself. Towards the end of January 1941, he quietly left his house on night at a late hour.

### **Forward Bloc's Impact on the Congress**

The Congress Working Committee had its own developing contradictions in the closing year of 1940. Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad, who was the Congress President at the time, held the view that, "non-violence was a matter of policy, not of creed." His view was that Indians had the right to take to the sword if they had no other alternative. Apart from this sound formulation with which Gandhiji was in basic disagreement, he had differentiated between an international struggle for freedom and an external struggle against aggression; the internal struggle was non-violent and the external struggle contemplated participation in a war for the preservation of so-called democracy, if India was free. To Subhas Chandra Bose, and for that matter to Forward Bloc, freedom and democracy were indivisible. His struggle abroad was an extension of his struggle within the country, for outside help for a country's freedom was indispensable. In his broadcast in April 1942 from Berlin, Subhas Chandra Bose, who had later on been given the honorific appellation of 'Netaji' in Germany by the 'Indian Legion' and later on universally accepted, had said :

"I have studied very carefully the struggle for liberty that has gone on all over the world during the last 200 years but I have not as yet discovered one single instance where freedom was won without outside help of some sort. Where the enemy is powerful, worldwide empire, the need for help is even greater. . . ."

Subhas Chandra Bose had remained steadfast to the unalterable objective of the Forward Bloc, viz., fulfilment of the 'National Demand.' About the internal and external policy of free India, he had given out in his Berlin broadcast of March 1942 that the internal policy of free India was the concern of the Indian people. He said :

"While the external policy should be one of collaboration with the enemies of Britain, regardless of ideological considerations, I stand for absolute self-determination where her national affairs are concerned and I shall never tolerate any interference in the internal policy of the Free

Indian State. . . . No one should make the mistake of concluding that external collaboration with the Tripartite Powers means acceptance of their domination or even of their ideology in our internal affairs. . . . When . . . India is liberated it will be my duty to report to my countrymen and leave it to them to decide what form of Government they would like to have. And as I have told Mahatma Gandhi . . . in June 1940."

Mahatma Gandhi was opposed to the offer of conditional cooperation by the Poona meeting of the AICC in July 1940, and retired from leadership because of his basic opposition to war. In September, Congress withdrew its offer of cooperation to the British. In October 1940, Gandhiji announced resistance to the war-efforts. Individual Satyagraha was started in November 1940 and Ministers and hundreds of leaders were taken to prison. It appeared Gandhiji had at last taken to the line of struggle, though not on an extensive scale.

In November 1941, the war clouds had gathered in the Far East. Some leaders of the Congress were released in December. At the same time Forward Bloc leaders like Sarat Chandra Bose, Sardul Singh Caveeshar and others were arrested. After the fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942, Cripps' Mission came to India in March 1942 and left in April. His proposal was rejected by Mahatma Gandhi as "post-dated cheque in respect of India's demand for freedom."

Cripps' proposals were rejected by the Allahabad meeting of the Congress Working Committee on 1 May 1942, which also resolved to offer non-violent non-cooperation to any foreign army, who would enter India. Gandhiji had sent a draft resolution to the Committee which it did not accept because of Jawaharlal Nehru's opposition. The draft, among other things, stated :

"Britain is incapable of defending India . . . . Japan's quarrel is not with India. She is warring against British Empire. If India were freed, her first step would probably be to negotiate with Japan. The Congress is of opinion, if the British withdrew from India, India would be able to defend herself in the event of the Japanese or any other aggressor attacking India."

Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad had observed how Subhas Chandra Bose had influenced Gandhiji's mind after his escape to Germany. Azad had observed : "I also said the Subhash Bose's escape to Germany had made a great impression on Gandhiji. He had not formerly approved many of Bose's actions, but now I found the change in his outlook. . . . His admiration for Subhash Bose unconsciously coloured his view about the whole war situation."

On 14 July, the Congress Working Committee meeting at Wardha demanded withdrawal of the British power from India forthwith "with all the non-violent strength it has gathered since 1920." "This was the famous 'Quit India' resolution of August 1942 when the whole of India

had risen in revolt against British occupation of the country.

The "Quit India" resolution passed at the Bombay session of the AICC on 8 August 1942 had ultimately come round to the demand for the withdrawal of British Power from India so that India might declare herself independent to form a provisional Government of Free India to frame her own Constitution. This was the essence of the 'National Demand' for which Subhas Chandra Bose gave a call at Jalpaiguri Provincial Conference in February 1939, reinforced by the Ramgarh Anti-Compromise Conference of March 1940. It could, therefore, truly have been said that Forward Bloc could at last prevail upon the Congress leadership to give up its policy of non-embarrassment and launch a struggle of resistance to win the battle of freedom.

Writing on Gandhiji's change of attitude on the war situation, Subhas Chandra Bose wrote in an article in Berlin: "Gandhiji not being an ideological fanatic, it is possible to influence him. There is not the slightest doubt that he has been influenced by the objective military situation and also by the propaganda of Forward Bloc. The line he has indicated in the above resolution of his, is on many points in accord with the policy advocated by the Forward Bloc since September 1939."

During his wartime flight to Germany and later on to Japan in a submarine, Subhas Chandra Bose was regularly and contemporaneously posted with events and happenings at home. He had, therefore, no occasion to feel isolated from activities at home and "he considered himself as intimately bound with the Indian National Congress and his role abroad to be complementary to movement led by the Congress inside India". He kept count of every important event of national importance in India and more particularly of those relating to the struggle for independence.

In tune with this attitude of his mind, he had never missed any opportunity to completely identify himself with the milieu of struggle, sacrifice and suffering prevailing at home. His broadcasts from Berlin, either over the Berlin or the Azad Hind Radio, and his broadcasts from Tokyo, Singapore, Rangoon or Saigon were all so direct and simple that they would unfailingly touch the sensitive chords in the hearts of patriotic Indians at home and abroad.

One may recall to mind such stirring calls as 'Father of our Nation', which Subhas Chandra Bose had uttered while invoking Mahatma Gandhi's blessings on 6 July 1944, when the Imphal operations were in full blast or when the anguished soul of Subhas Chandra Bose cried out, from somewhere in Burma on 12 September 1944—"My Divine Motherland shall not be cut up"—at once a warning and an invocation against the proposal for the division of the country.

### **Ideology of Forward Bloc : Socialism not Marxism**

A political party was not only an instrument of action to achieve a desired political objective, but also contemplated a way of life, i.e. a pattern of life in its totality, with its attendant values, which the new society should inherit. Subhas Chandra Bose, the Founder of Forward Bloc, grew up with these abiding sense of values, which gave him a uniqueness of character all his own. It was the message of Swami Vivekananda : "Seek your own salvation in the welfare of humanity", which animated him at the age of fifteen, which he could transform later on into the message of salvation of humanity in 1938 at Haripura along with the freedom of India : "India freed means humanity in 1938 at Haripura along with the freedom of India : "India freed means humanity saved". That was how he concluded his Haripura Address.

The starting point of Subhas Chandra Bose's political action was the dictum : "the best way to end a Government is to withdraw from it" and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose ended up with armed resistance to the British occupation of India to win freedom and then to reconstruct India on Socialistic lines. But what were the instruments of struggle to effectuate :

- (1) The National Revolution
- (2) The Social Revolution

The leadership could transmute to the body of men who made up the organisational structure of Forward Bloc and later on of the Indian National Army. These instruments of struggle for social change were sacrifice, suffering and the cult of dedication and courage. These were the characteristics of 'Indianness' which laid the foundation of the matrix of Indian way of life on which Subhas Chandra Bose sought to build up new man, new society, and new life.

He founded the Forward Bloc to give material shape to such ideas he had formed about the future content and structure of India's social life. He firmly believed that India of the past is not dead. The past is living in the present and will continue to live in the future. To him, 'Life is a Mission, a duty' and "India has a mission to fulfil". This was the profound import of life brought home to him and this was the parameter within which Forward Bloc was called upon to function.

It was the historic role of the Forward Bloc to place this ideology of Subhas Chandra Bose, which became sharper still in Netaji, along with the programme and revolutionary technique of uncompromising struggle, to the masses. The emergence of Forward Bloc as a party in Nagpur Conference of the All-India Forward Bloc in June 1940, was an eloquent testimony to its unmistakable necessity.

Subhas Chandra Bose raised the necessity of forming a Left-wing in the thirties. In his *Indian Struggle*, he had unreservedly recorded : "The future of India ultimately lies with a party with a clear ideology,

programme and plan of action—a party that will not only fight and win freedom, but put into effect the entire programme of post-war reconstruction”.

Synthesis of diversities in India has struck a delicate balance in our social life in a unified whole. The physical and the mental, the material and the spiritual, all have been integrated in the Indian scheme of life. Indian culture also as a whole is a product of this spirit of synthesis. But at a certain point of time the synthesis was to give way because of growing imbalance of the facts that constitute the different aspects of life. Here again the social equilibrium would be restored and a new synthesis established at a newer level.

To Netaji, the synthesis of the spiritual and material values formed essential elements in the social consciousness of an individual. He wrote in his article on the Pyramids : “The glorious periods of our history were when we were able to strike the golden mean between the demands of spirit and matter of the soul and of the body, and thereby progress simultaneously on both fronts.”

In his article sent from Kabul in March 1941, giving an outline of the Forward Bloc, he said : “It does not swear by copy-book maxims or by text book of Politics or Economics. It is anxious to assimilate all the knowledge that the outside world can give and to profit by the experience of other progressive nations. It regards progress and evolution as an internal process to which India also has a contribution to make.”

Subhas Chandra Bose was a socialist. But the socialism he had advocated should not be planted from outside the country but should develop within the country, according to her genius. In one of his speeches in 1931, he said : “I also think India should evolve her own form of socialism”, and again he said, “It may be that the form of socialism which will evolve will have something new and original about it.”

Earlier, he said in one of his famous speeches : “That socialism did not derive its birth from the books of Karl Marx. It has its origin in the thought and culture of India.”

Subhas Chandra Bose categorically rejected Marxism long before he had left India. Apart from the fact that ever since Vivekananda entered his life, when he was about fifteen years of age, he had started to imbibe spiritual *sadhana* : he became an ardent advocate of synthesis as a fundamental fact of our cultural life. But in 1933, when he thought of working out a synthesis between the two antithetical principles of Communism and Fascism, the then prevailing principal thought—current dominating Europe and for that matter sweeping across the mass of men throughout the world, it was proposed to be built up around the common traits of these two thought-processes or ideologies. This synthesis was called “Samyabada”—‘the Doctrine of Synthesis or Equality’, as Subhas Chandra

Bose named it.

This doctrine was the end-result of a controversy which arose on 18 December 1933. In a Press statement Jawaharlal Nehru expressed the view that "Fundamentally, the choice before the world today is one between some form of Communism and some form of Fascism, and I am all for the former, that is Communism . . . One has to choose between the two and I choose the Communist ideal. . . . I do think that the basic ideology of Communism and its scientific interpretation of history is sound."

Subhas Chandra Bose characterised this view "as fundamentally wrong. Unless we are at the end of the process of evolution or unless we deny evolution altogether, there is no reason to hold that our choice is restricted to two alternatives. . . . One is inclined to hold that the next phase in world history will produce a synthesis between communism and Fascism." About the reasons which militate against Communists' acceptance in India, the factors still at work are : appeal of nationalism, religious freedom, compulsion of Soviet hegemony, if sought to be created, materialistic-monistic interpretation of history do not square up with realities and, therefore, more often than not, becomes mechanistic in interpretation, which is nothing less than laboured interpretation of history. Herein lay the secret to the tremendous appeal of Forward Bloc as an instrument both to win Independence and for socialistic reconstruction.

Marxism postulates the primacy of matter as opposed to the duality of spirit and matter of mind and matter in the very nature of things. In jettisoning mind of spirit, the human reality becomes lopsided. This eventuality causes the break-up of the totality of man and for that matter the totality of the human society, which can alone lend itself to action for a change.

Now the demands of matter and spirit, body and mind had equally been recognised in real life, had time and again been demonstrated. One such classic instance was provided by a letter which Netaji wrote to the Government of Bengal, in November 1940, immediately before he undertook his historic fast unto death. The fragrance of the spirit, which flowed within the lofty words of the letter was the soul of the founder of the Forward Bloc seeking salvation. He said :

"In this mortal world, everything perishes and will perish but ideas, ideals and dreams do not. One individual may die for an idea but that idea will after his death incarnate itself in a thousand lives, that is how the wheel of evolution moves on and the ideas, the dreams of one generation are bequeathed to the next."

Ten years after the debate on Communism in 1933, Netaji spoke on the "Fundamental Problems of India" before the students of the Tokyo Imperial University in November 1944, on the same problem. He repea-

ted the same views as before about "working out a synthesis of the rival systems and try to embody the good points of both."

About class-conflict, he opined that it was unnecessary in India. If the government of Free India began to work as the organ of the masses, there was no need for class conflict. He noted that the economic factor should not be over-emphasised. It is not the only factor involving social change. It was one of many other factors. The dynamics of social change was pluralist.

Class struggle is an indisputable fact in society. It is not the only determinant of historical change. But because of the conflict of economic interest inherent in the struggles of peasants and workers for their complete emancipation, such economic conflicts find place in the overall conflict for freedom. The Ramgarh Anti-Compromise Conference (March 1940), and the Second Annual Forward Bloc had taken cognisance of class-struggle as their base of operation.

In the words of Anil Roy, one of the closest colleagues of Subhas Chandra Bose in the Forward Bloc: "Netaji's theory of state is expressed in the dictum 'All power to the Indian people'." He visualised a people's state in which Kisans and Majdoors have the final say and power. Here also he had his differences with the Marxist doctrine about the future of the state. The state in his view is a social category and is the instrument of people's will.

In the context of the ideology of Forward Bloc, a persistent and perhaps wilful misrepresentation of the character of Forward Bloc had been sought to be foisted on the party. Early in its career, the Founder of Forward Bloc, while writing the Editorial of the weekly *Forward Bloc*, dated August 12, 1939, under the caption, "The Role of Forward Bloc" had been analysing the discussion, which he had with the Socialist and Communist friends: he had observed, "that the role of the CSP within the Congress should be an anti-imperialist Leftist-wing role and not a socialist role and only by playing the former role, would it continue to make headway." In his opinion, socialism at that time was not an immediate objective. CSP which functioned as a Marxist Party at that time agreed with this view of the Editor of *Forward Bloc* when the matter was discussed after Haripura. Incidentally, the Editor suggested that the foundation of a Marxist Party could be laid thereby: "I feel further that only by that means could the onslaught of the Right be resisted and the soil prepared for the growth of a Marxist Party. By a solitary utterance of the word Maxism in altogether a different context, his views on Marxism were twisted."

These ideas of Subhas Chandra Bose were crystal clear by late twenties and onwards. The years 1929, 1931 and 1933 were landmarks in this regard, as he had spelled out his attitude about Marxism in unmistakable terms in these years. In 1944, he reported the same to the



students of Tokyo University but attempts to pass off Forward Bloc and its Founder as Marxists have since been made.

But history has brushed it aside in its untrammelled march towards Truth.

While discussing the ideology of Forward Bloc and for the matter of its Founder, one should recall to his mind that Subhas Chandra Bose in his pursuit of Truth or Reality, said :

"Reality is too big to comprehend... We have to build our life on the theory which contains the maximum truth. Reality, therefore, is spirit, the essence of which is love gradually unfolding itself in an eternal play of conflicting forces and their solutions."

### **Forward Bloc's Projection: Indian National Army**

It may be remembered that when Mahatma Gandhi commended his non-cooperation programme to the Indian National Congress at Nagpur in 1920, he said, "If India had the sword to-day, she would have drawn the sword". Netaji continued his above speech and said : "...Mahatmaji then said that since armed revolution was out of the question, the only other alternative before the country was that of non-cooperation or Satyagraha. Since then times have changed and it is now possible for the Indian Army to draw the sword." Maulana Azad also pleaded the same line of reasoning as Congress President during the war years, as has been noted earlier.

The Forward Bloc was inaugurated early in May 1939. After about thirteen months of organisation and struggle the Founder was arrested on 2 July 1940, detained till 5 December 1940, and thereafter he escaped to Germany in January 1941. He was, therefore, left with a little over one year to organise and launch an uncompromising struggle against the British rulers.

But he had his close links with the struggle in India. For a year he kept silent but after the fall of Singapore in February 1942, he started addressing his countrymen over the Radio and in articles he unequivocally stated about Forward Bloc's line of action in India at that time.

In an article written in Berlin in the Journal *Azad Hind* 1942, No. 5/6. before the August struggle had commenced, while giving full support of Gandhiji in his demand for withdrawal of British rule, he gave "the line which the Forward Bloc had adopted towards the Congress resolution and the campaign of civil disobedience is as follows :

1. Give strong support to Gandhiji in his demand for the withdrawal of the British from India and condemn all those who attack Gandhiji.
2. Tell the Indian people that they should not think of the compromise with Britain at any stage even if Britain were to offer one and some of the Indian leaders were to agree to it.

3. Tell the Indian people that stationing the Allied Armies in India is tantamount to declaring war on the Tripartite Powers and provoking them to attack Allied military bases in India. Consequently, demand for withdrawal of British rule should include the physical withdrawal of Allied Armies from India and also of British officials. Without such physical withdrawal the Independence we shall get will be independence on paper.

4. Warn the Indian people that appeal to the United Nations is useless. The United Nations mean in reality Britain and America, the other nations being mere puppet. In the last war, the whole world was deceived by Wilson's Fourteen Points, though Wilson was personally an idealist. The Atlantic Charter of the imperialist Roosevelt will betray humanity even more.

5. Tell the Indian people that India can, under no circumstances, offer cooperation in the war, as the price of independence. India can, at most, offer to be neutral, if Britain recognises her independence. This should satisfy Britain and, more than this, India should not offer, otherwise the war will be dragged into India by the Indians themselves.

It would, therefore, be quite evident that Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose had reached the stage of openly declaring that civil disobedience failing to secure the liberation of India, Indian people should be ready to take up arms in the final struggle.

The transition from non-violent civil disobedience to armed struggle was, therefore, a function of the situation prevailing at a given point of time. The Revolutionary in Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, who had functioned within the Congress as long as he was in India.

Forward Bloc found its consummation in the formation of the Indian National Army, and the armed struggle to expel the British power from India was a logical culmination of struggle for Independence, 'severance of British connection'.

### **Personalities and Persons**

An account of the Forward Bloc would remain incomplete without an attempt to recall the names of those who came to join the Forward Bloc at its inception and continued to be a part of it till Subhas Chandra Bose left India. Some of his colleagues had remained steadfast to the challenge of not only the alien rule but also to the challenge of social reconstruction. Some of the latter category are still at their post of duty to consummate the social revolution.

After the inauguration of the Forward Bloc, Subhas Chandra Bose had observed: "Bengal in particular stood solidly behind us and there the Forward Bloc had the best start possible."

Apart from Sardul Singh Caveesher (Punjab), Lala Sankar Lal (Delhi), General Secretary, H.V. Kamath (ICS resigned), Jabalpur,

Organising Secretary; Vishambhar Dayal Tripathi (U.P.), peasant leader, secretary were there. In Bengal leaders of the revolutionary fraternities manned the Bengal Forward Bloc of whom Satya Ranjan Bakshi was one. Moulavi Ashrafuddin Ahmed Chowdhuri, General Secretary, Bengal Provincial Congress Committee, was another member in the Working Committee. In this way, recognised leaders of the Congress and Socialists from some other provinces were drawn in the Forward Bloc. M. Annapurnia (Andhra), K.F. Nariman (Bombay), Dibkar Patnaik (Utkal), Mian Akbar Shah (NWFP), Sheel Bhadra Yajee (Bihar), Indulal Yajnik (Gujarat) were also drawn. Some other names well known and lesser known may also be noted: Nathalal Parekh (Bombay), Senapati Bapat (Maharashtra), S.K. Hosmani (Karnataka), Jata Shankar Shukla and Raj Kumar Sinha (U.P.), Md. Abdur Rahaman (Kerala), Ramguti Gangth (Benaras), Suresh Chandra Deb (Surma Valley), Mian Md. Shah (Nowshera), Sriramamurthi (Madras), V.M. Bhus Kute (Maharashtra), Padamkant Malaviya (Allahabad), and a host of others drawn from the districts were subjected to repression.

During the 'National Week' celebrations in 1940, more than forty persons were convicted in Allahabad alone. They were arrested on charges of holding meetings, taking processions and of trying to hoist National Flag on Government buildings.

The Holwell Monument protest movement drew almost all the leaders of Bengal in the wake of Subhas Chandra Bose's arrest on 2 July 1940, while they had functioned as dictators of the struggle one after another. Although it was conducted on the mandate of Dacca Session of the Bengal Provincial Conference, the Forward Bloc leaders took charge of the movement and conducted it. Among those arrested were: Narendra Narayan Chakraborty, Tarakdas Banerjee, Anil Roy, Leela Roy, Harendra Nath Ghosh, Phani Majumdar, Aswini Ganguli, Biswanath Mukherjee, Kalipada Bagchi, Naren Das (BPCC), Rajendra Lal Dev, Hemanta Kumar Bose and others.

Among other veterans, Prof. Jyotish Ghosh, Hem Chandra Ghosh, Nishtha Nath Kundu, Sasanka Sekhar Sanyal, Khagendra Nath Das, Pramatha Nath Banerjee, Jaty Bhusan Gupta, Basanta Majumdar, Hema Prova Majumdar, Niharendu Dutta Majumdar were among the galaxy of leaders, who had joined Forward Bloc early in its career.

Revolutionary leaders of Anushilan Samiti like Maharaj Trailokya Nath Chakravorthy, Pratul Chandra Ganguli, Rabindra Mohan Sen and some of those who had worked under their leadership had also joined.

Arrests and repressions were the order of the day. These were intensified with the initiation of the national struggle during the 'National Week' on 6 to 13 April. War Councils were formed in every city or town of consequence. In the Second Annual Conference of Forward Bloc at Nagpur in June 1940, the nine members of the Working Committee of

the All-India Forward Bloc were congratulated for their arrest and incarceration. These were: V.D. Tripathi (U.P.), Senapati Bapat (Maharashtra), H.V. Kamath (Bombay), H. Annupurniah (Andhra), Sheela Bhadra Yajee (Bihar), Jata Shankar Shukla (U.P.), Ashrafuddin Chowdhuri (Bengal), Satya Ranjan Bakshi (Bengal), and Indulal Yagnik (Gujarat).

On the arrest and detention of Subhas Chandra Bose, the chorus of condemnation, which found expression throughout the length and breadth of the country was the measure of support which the policy of Forward Bloc had enjoyed.

### **In Retrospect**

After Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose had met Hitler on 27 May 1942 in Germany, he had turned his undivided attention to shift his scene of activities to East Asia. Singapore had fallen on 15 February 1942 and in consequence the theatre of war in the East was hotting up.

The All-India Forward Bloc was declared illegal under a special ordinance promulgated by the Government of India on 22 June 1942. A few days after, on 4 July, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, in a telephonic conversation from Berlin to Tokyo with Rash Behari Bose, President of the Indian Independence League in the East, urged upon him "to co-operate with Forward Bloc which had [in his own words] a large following in the country" to secure Japanese armed support for India's fight for freedom.

That he had Forward Bloc in his mind while away to Germany and Japan, could be had from many sources. Immediately after reaching Berlin he had sent a message telegraphically to his Indian contactman through the Italian Legation in Kabul on 20 May 1941. The message read: "... We need Sardul Singh to represent the public activity of Forward Bloc."

Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose has symbolised in his person the truest revolution, the symbol of national unity which could combine Indians into an unprecedented unity of action irrespective of caste, creed and language. He was the symbol of the synthesis of values—a symbol of the Indian way of life in its totality. He was one of the few Indian leaders of international repute who opposed the division of the country over the Radio from Burma on 12 September 1944 with voice of intense anguish. He said: "My divine Motherland shall not be cut up." A man of unflinching devotion to the cause of the country's freedom would give everything for it. Truly, he said, "You must give life, if you want to get it."

As a true revolutionary, he did never acknowledge defeat and was confident that his cause was bound to prevail in the long run.

This was Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, who had sought to build up the Forward Bloc in his own image and create revolutionary value con-

ductive to the emergence of new man, new society and new life. He disappeared into the unknown for the last time on 18 August 1945, after the defeat of Japan. With undying faith in India's destiny and with unfaltering loyalty to India alone, he presaged another revolution and gave the heartening message to the world and to his countrymen that: "The next remarkable contribution to the culture and civilisation of the world, India will be called upon to make. . ."

That was the keynote of social change, which the Forward Bloc sought to offer to the country. Forward Bloc could impart a revolutionary dimension to the process of change. The forces unleashed by the dynamic politics of Forward Bloc, though ruthlessly suppressed, could set in the process of withdrawal of British power from India. It was beyond any shadow of doubt that the matchless leadership of the Indian revolution initiated by Subhas Chandra Bose defeated the imperialist power in the final strategy of withdrawal from India.

After the war when normal activities were resumed, Forward Bloc opposed partition and division of the country, pursuant to Netaji's lead. The Marxist elements in the Forward Bloc disrupted the Party on this issue on the face of Netaji's declared policy to oppose it. Thereafter, the Marxists also abandoned the ideology of dynamic Synthesis based on duality of spirit and matter and replaced it by Marxian monism or materialism. At a later date, the 'Subhasist' Forward Bloc, as distinct from the Marxists faction, combined with all forces of democracy, freedom, nationalism and socialism to form a comprehensive merger of these forces in the country and thereby place Netaji's leadership in the heart of the Socialism Movement in India.

The war-time British Intelligence Reports on Forward Bloc could measure up to its revolutionary potentiality.

The Secretary of State for India in his Report to India-Burma Committee of British Cabinet dated 30 August 1945, detailed out the dangerous activities of Forward Bloc to the effect that: "Subhas Bose. . . would reappear . . . to lead a revolt at opportune time."

Again, the plan of Forward Bloc, capturing power in the name of the Indian National Congress is also recorded in Transfer of Power (1942-47), Vol. VI, Page 186. Taking all in all, Netaji worked ceaselessly for his Mission, which was the 'Indian Revolution' and Forward Bloc was the medium for its fulfilment.

The Indian Revolution remained unfinished. But India would live for the day of its fulness with an instrument equal to the task.

## ALL INDIA STATES' PEOPLES' CONFERENCE

The Indian National Congress is generally considered to be the organisation, which spearheaded the struggle for India's liberation from foreign rule, culminating in the country's freedom in 1947. While this assumption may not be wrong, one may add that the Congress movement was supplemented at a later stage with more or less a parallel movement which may be regarded as the vanguard of the freedom struggle in the Indian States. These States, big and small, were spread all over the country, covering nearly one-third of the country's area and no less than one-fourth of its total population. But why was a separate popular organisation needed for the emancipation of the people living in the princely states, and why did the Congress not fight directly for their freedom as it did for the rest of the people living in the country? For answering this question, something must be said about the erstwhile states, their early history and the reasons which persuaded the British Government not only to preserve them but also to add to their numbers.

Strewn capriciously all over the country, there were about 600 principalities, which did not form part of British India. Historically, the main common feature distinguishing these territories from the Provinces was that, unlike the latter, they had not been annexed by the British power. Thus, politically speaking, there were two Indias—"British India", governed by the Crown according to the statutes of Parliament and enactments of the Indian legislature; and the "Indian States" under the suzerainty of the Crown and still for the most part under the personal rule of the Princes.

Under the Government of India Act 1935, the term 'Indian State' has been defined as that which included "any territory, whether described as a state, estate and a *jagir* or otherwise belonging to or under the suzerainty of a ruler, who is under the suzerainty of His Majesty, and not being part of British India". Apparently, this definition did not help either the erstwhile government or the people to be very sure as to the exact number of states. The Butler Committee and the Simon Commission, for example, applied this term in 562 units whereas the Joint

Committee of Parliament on Indian Constitutional Reforms referred to 600 such units as states. No two books or even official reports on India ever agreed as to the exact number of the states.

Another interesting feature of these States was their wide variety, size, revenue and general importance. At one end were states like Hyderabad and Kashmir, which were as big as the United Kingdom and on the other were small holdings in Kathiawad and Simla Hills, which were no bigger than children's parks in metropolitan towns. Out of the 562 states, as many as 454 had collectively an area of less than 1000 sq. miles and 452 had a population of less than a million. Out of them it is only about 30 that possessed the area, population and resources of an average British India district. On the other hand, there were as many as 15 states with territories under a square mile each. In spite of these staggering disparities, the term 'state' was applied to all these territories.

The main feature of administration in the states, which was common to them all, was that it was personal and arbitrary in nature. There were of course, separate departments like education, health, finance, industry, etc., but these were a pale lifeless copy of the bureaucratic set-up in the provinces. A first-hand account of conditions obtaining in states in the twenties has come down to us from Jawaharlal Nehru's experience of trial and detention in Jaitu in Nabha state. In contravention of the order of the state government, he entered the state territory where upon he was arrested and tried for conspiracy. He was handcuffed and kept in the lock-up. About his two weeks' experience in the lock-up and the jail and his trial in a so-called court, Jawaharlal says:

"Two or three days later, we were taken to court for our case, and the most extraordinary and Gilbertian proceedings went on there from day-to-day. The Magistrate or Judge seemed to be wholly uneducated. He knew no English, of course, but I doubt if he knew how to write the court language, Urdu."

The written petitions, which Nehru submitted to the court, were not looked into and Jawaharlal was not allowed to engage a lawyer from outside. But he took all this in good humour, and after referring to the incident in his *Autobiography*, says:

"Most of the Indian states are well known for their backwardness and their semi-feudal condition, their personal autocracies, devoid even of competence of benevolence. Many a strange thing occurs there which never received publicity. And yet their very inefficiency lessens the evil in some ways and lightens the burden on their unhappy people. For, this is reflected in a weak executive, and it results in making even tyranny and injustice inefficient. It is not making tyranny more bearable, but it does make it less far reaching and widespread. . ."

That happened in 1923. It would be wrong to imagine that things changed for the better after the lapse of 15 years or so. They did not.

Most of the states led a transcendental existence, as it were. They were impervious to change. The Patiala ruler, for example (Patiala was the biggest state in the Punjab) would not allow any party to agitate for better administrative set-up or for grant of civil liberties to the people. Though a Praja Mandal had been clandestinely formed there, it was never allowed to work. Some Praja Mandal workers had an interview with the Maharaja in August 1939. In the course of his talk, this is what the Maharaja told the deputationists:

"My ancestors have won the state by the sword and I mean to keep it by the sword. I do not recognize any organization to represent my people or to speak on their behalf. I am their sole and only representative. No organization such as Praja Mandal can be allowed to exist within the state. If you want to do Congress work, get out of the state. The Congress can terrify the British government but if it ever tries to interfere in my state, it will find me a terrible resister. I cannot tolerate any flag other than my own to be flown within my boundaries. You stop your Praja Mandal activities, otherwise I shall resort to such repression that your generations to come will not forget it. When I see some of my dear subjects drifting away into another fold, it touches the very core of my heart. I advise you to get out of the Mandal and stop all kind of agitation; or else, remember, I am a military man, my talk is blunt and my bullet straight."

This incident, a report of which was sent to Gandhiji, was published in the *Harijan*.

Generally speaking, the administrative set-up of the states varied greatly. There was a very wide difference in the degree of the state of administrative efficiency reached by the most advanced and the most backward. According to official records of the Chamber of Princes, 60 states had set up some form of legislative bodies by 1938. In several others, schemes for associating the people with the governance of their states were under consideration in 1945-46. In most cases, the development of representative institutions did not approximate to the growth of self-governing institutions in the provinces. For example, Hyderabad, the biggest and the most important Indian state, never had a popularly elected legislative assembly till it was taken over by the Central Ministry of States in 1948. Till 1935, an overwhelmingly large number of states had no municipal committees. Even such states as had been looked upon as no more than symbols of prestige and mere pieces of decoration contrived to lend dignity to the rulers and grace to certain ceremonials.

The truth is that neither the princes nor the Paramount Power or for that matter any apologist of the princely order could ever claim any progressive or modern trend in the states. In his official report, Sir Harcourt Butler was himself obliged to say: "There are states, patriarchical or quasi-feudal, which still linger in a medieval atmosphere, and states



which are purely under autocratic administration."

Such were the states ruled by the Indian princes. Their large number, their sprawling boundaries, their feudal administrations, their so-called oriental setting and their bejewelled rulers presented a picture which now and then charmed a foreign visitor in search of ancient relics. But as soon as one realised that eighty million people paid a heavy penalty for the making of this mosaic, one could not help sympathising with the states, peoples and lending support to their struggle for fundamental rights and their demand for at least a responsive, if not responsible, government.

That being the case, the disparity at the political and developmental level between the native states and British Indian provinces could not but look marked. With every dose of political reforms granted to the provinces, the people of the states felt that they were lagging behind their neighbours politically and economically and that, situated as they were, there was little hope of their emerging out of those straits unless they organised themselves in spite of all the hazards involved in it. This was also the advice repeatedly given to them by Mahatma Gandhi. He guided the States' peoples by his writings in the *Harijan*. Its issues are littered with letters from leaders of States' peoples, complaining of atrocities and repression. The All-India Congress which, though fully sympathetic to the aspirations of the states' peoples, did not want to involve itself directly in their agitation for liberalisation of the administration of the states. In fact, the Congress, though never lagged behind for its concern for the welfare of the states' peoples, always advised them to set up a separate organisation of their own for conducting their agitation. The Congress was not willing to involve itself in their struggle.

After many an effort and after getting over good many hurdles, leading representatives of the states' people met in Bombay in November 1927 and formed the All India States' Peoples' Conference, which held its first session in the following month. Balwantray Mehta of Bhavnagar and G.B. Trivedi did yeoman work in preparing the people for the first session within the few weeks they had at their disposal. The Press was flooded with pamphlets, leaflets and bulletins issued from Mehta's office.

With the background thus well prepared, the first session of the All-India States' Peoples' Conference was held on 17 December 1927 in Bombay. More than 1,500 people attended it. Of these, 750 were members of the Reception Committee, the rest being delegates and visitors representing more than 70 states. Dewan Bahadur Ram Chandra Rao presided over it and Gobindlal Shivalal Motilal was the Chairman of the Reception Committee. The presidential address and the welcome speech of the Chairman of the Reception Committee explained the aims and objects of the Conference and thereafter gave typical illustrations of the

autocracy and corruption that prevailed in the states.

Ram Chandra Rao in his address drew a lurid picture of the conditions prevailing in the states and put in a forceful plea for the appointment of an enquiry committee to look into the states' people's grievances. He exhorted the states' peoples to secure the cooperation of all political organisations in British India. He said:

"I refuse to believe that there is anybody in the Indian states, be he a prince or a peasant, who will not wholeheartedly subscribe to these ideals and not do his best to realise them. A large vision of Indian political destiny has permeated all classes of people throughout India and on this main question there is and there can be absolutely no differences between the people of British India and the Indian States. A free, strong, united self-governing and self-supporting India is our aim and . . . the All-India Congress Committee\* has charged the working committee of the Congress to frame a scheme in consultation with the various political parties in the country. I sincerely hope that this Committee and the other political organisations will not content themselves with framing proposals relating only to British India leaving the position of the Indian states in the new constitution undefined . . ."

The first session of the All India States' Peoples' Conference was quite a success. It brought on surface the popular demand for responsible government and civil liberties in Indian States. The representatives of various states gave expression to their views regarding the difficulties and problems the states' people were facing. Jaya Narayan Vyas of Jodhpur emphasised that the chief aim of the Conference should be the demand for responsible government in Indian states through representative institutions under the aegis of the rulers. D.V. Gokhale warned the rulers against the danger of alienating their subjects. He said that the rulers must realise that they existed to serve the interest of their people, otherwise their ultimate fate would be the same as had been that of autocrats all over the world. Amritlal Thakar, Jamnalal Bajaj, and Manaklal Kothari emphasised the need for setting up organisations in all the states for carrying out constructive work of *Khaddar*, temperance and the uplift of the backward classes. Atiya Begum asked for a public proclamation by the princes giving to the people the right to freedom of speech and freedom of press and security of person and property to all.

The first session of the All India States' Peoples' Conference (AISPC) had two major achievements to its credit. First, it set the tone of agitation for popular rule in the states. Second, it drew the All India Congress close to the states' people in so far as helping the latter and the need of co-ordinating the agitation for popular rule in the two parts of India were concerned. Not unexpectedly, the AISPC, according to one

\*The reference is to the Nehru Committee.

of its resolutions, deputed two of its leaders, Manaklal Kothari and B.S. Pathik to meet the Congress leaders and secure the active support of that organisation for the states' people's demand. It must be the outcome of the efforts of these two leaders that in its Madras session (December 1927), the Congress adopted for the first time in its history, a resolution endorsing the demand of the states' people for responsible government.

Partly as a result of the overt support, the Congress lent to the States' Peoples' Conference, and partly the important nature of successive events occurring at the time, the activities of this newly born organisation received great momentum. The Nehru Committee, which had then begun grappling with the task of framing a constitution for free India, displayed active interest in the future of the states' people, largely because of the public opinion created by the AISPC and the forceful pleas of its delegation invited to depose before the Nehru Committee. Though the princes rejected it, the Nehru Report did suggest a new forum for discussion and invited the princes and the states' people for finding an accepted solution of the states' problem.

The AISPC also made a desperate effort to persuade the Butler Committee to give a hearing to a deputation of the states' people. After all, the Butler Committee was set up to report on the status and position of the princes *vis-a-vis* the Paramount Power. It could be well argued the AISPC spokesman, say a few words about the power of the princes *vis-a-vis* the people. But the Butler Committee did not accept AISPC's plea to recognise the states' people as a party to the dispute. Though successful in its objective of representing their case to the Butler Committee, the activities of the AISPC received great publicity and made states' peoples' cause and their problems mere widely appreciated.

What might be thought to be a beginning was reflected in another remarkable decision taken by the AISPC. The states' people and their leaders knew how active the Chamber of Princes and individual rulers were in England to influence the members of the Butler Committee. Following in their foot-steps and in order to undo their propaganda, the All India States' Peoples' Conference also decided to send a deputation of its representatives to England. This deputation did yeoman service to the cause of the states' people by informing the British public of the real state of affairs prevailing in the states. The deputation met members of the British Parliament, prominent public men and newspaper men and addressed many public meetings. On the whole, their cause struck a responsive chord in the hearts of the British public.

The delegates also prepared a memorandum and submitted it to the British public. This document aroused a great deal of sympathy and support for the states' peoples' cause in British political circles. It was a powerful plea for the recognition of the rights of the people, which the princes supported by the Paramount Power were determined to brush

aside. The claim of the princes, floating about by the dozen in London's fashionable hotels, that they represented their people was exploded. Before returning to India, the States' People's deputation set up a committee to work in London for educating the British public opinion and to act as the agency of the States' Peoples' Conference there.

Perhaps the most outstanding success of the States' People's Conference was that it put the case of the states' people so forcefully and yet so objectively that it succeeded in raising this question above party line. Their cause received spontaneous support alike from the Indian National Congress and the National Liberal Federation as also other detached organisations and public men of prominence. Besides Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Jamnalal Bajaj, B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, Satyamurti and many others in the Congress, the States' Peoples' Conference had the good luck of enjoying full sympathy and active support from non-Congress leaders like Srinivas Sastri, C.Y. Chintamani, Amritlal Thakkar of the Servants of India Society, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, etc.

Within one year, the AISPC grew into a well-knit country-wide organisation. As a result of its policy and advice, Praja Mandals were set up in individual states, which were affiliated to the AISPC. In Rajputana, Punjab and Central India most of the states established their own Praja Mandals, which received the guidance from and were largely responsible to the parent organisation, the AISPC. The fight which the Praja Mandals of Bikaner, Jodhpur, Patiala, Nabha, Jaipur, to mention only a few, had to wage against their rulers and the state administrations form an integral part of the history of the freedom movement in princely states. Those who led the respective movements—like Jai Narayan Vyas in Jodhpur, Balwantray Mehta in Bhavnagar, Seva Singh in Patiala, Gani Zail Singh in Faridkot, Sant Ram in Nabha, Sheikh Abdullah in Jammu and Kashmir, Dassappa in Mysore, Swami Ram Tirath in Hyderabad—had to undergo untold sufferings and all the repression that autocratic and irresponsible administrations can let loose on the people.

The AISPC owed its growth to the sufferings and sacrifices of these people and others like them. The Praja Mandals took up the cause of civil liberties, liberalisation, if not democratisation, of the Governmental set-up, improvement of working conditions of kisans and labourers, and in all these matters, respective departments of the AISPC helped and guided them.

The conditions of labour in Indian states were very deplorable. Forced labour was in existence in most of these territories. Workers and peasants were groaning under oppressive labour laws and the de-humanising system of *begar*. When it came to be known that an Indian delegation was proceeding to Geneva to take part in the International Labour Conference, Balwantray Mehta was asked to prepare a memorandum on be-

half of the Indian delegation. Shiva Rao welcomed the memorandum given to him and made good use of it at Geneva. Similarly on the occasion of the Bombay Presidency Youth Conference in Ahmedabad in 1929, the AISPC sent a delegation under the leadership of Meghani representing the youth of the Indian states. It proved to be a valuable opportunity to discuss questions of Indian states. The delegation succeeded in its object and the Youth Conference not only deplored the conditions obtaining in Indian states but also adopted a resolution promising all help of the youth from British India to the Indian states' youth in their struggle for responsible government.

The conditions prevailing in Indian states at the time bore some resemblance to the conditions which prevailed in England towards the close of the seventeenth century. In England Parliament and representative institutions existed, but the people were engaged in a grim fight to assert popular rights by reducing the power and arbitrary authority of the Crown. In Indian states, on the other hand, there were hardly any representative institutions but the people drew inspiration from what was happening in the provinces in British India. They were also waging a fight, perhaps far grimmer than the people of England had to do, against their rulers' autocracy. It is not, therefore, surprising if, as in England more than 200 years earlier, the Indian states too thought of popularising and propagating their cause through pamphlets, books and booklets. The AISPC became the spearhead of this activity. It encouraged the authors to bring out publications which might expose the administration of the states and further the cause of the Conference. In course of time, the AISPC was able to discover its own Hobbes, Swifts, Walpoles and Burkes.

The first book of the series appeared in 1929. It was a treatise on political practice. It cleared much of the fog which had gathered round the so-called treaty rights of the princes. The theory of direct relationship with the Crown and the so-called sovereignty of the states were shown in their right perspective. The book presented a picture of the nature and extent of treaty rights of some of the princes.

The fantastic scheme of Sir Leslie Scott, the princes' advocate, before the Butler Committee, also attracted a rejoinder by the AISPC. The Conference brought out a critique of Sir Leslie Scott's scheme which exposed the general reactionary attitude of the princes towards all problems of constitutional and political import. The theory of direct relationship with the Crown led to the belief that there were two Indias. It was condemned and rejected outright. *Fears, Prejudices and Professions* was another book, which the Conference published, giving an interesting analysis of all that the princes had claimed and demanded at the Round Table Conference and in their statements bearing on the Indian Federation.

Another publication of a descriptive, although satirical, character,

which became very popular was *Navanagar of Prince Ranjee*. This book gave the inside story of the administration of the Jam Sahib of Navanagar. It was descriptive and analytical and written in an elegant style, which drew praise from Sir P.S. Sivaswami Iyer and C.Y. Chintamani. It focussed attention on the dark nooks and recesses of Jamnagar and purported to expose the vaunted boast of a ruler, who called himself an enlightened administrator.

Another excellent book, which soon acquired the reputation of being a standard work on states, was written by P.L. Chudgar of Rajkot, one of the leading workers of the AISPC. His work *Indian Princes under British Protection*, gave in a nutshell a comprehensive account of the complex problems of the native states. This was supplemented by Prof. Abhyankar's *Problems of Indian States*. The AISPC could not have done better than sponsoring such publications for educating the public and acquainting people in British India with the woes of those living in the Indian states. The contribution of this literature was aimed at popularising the cause of the states' people and enlisting for them the support of all sections of public opinion of the country. The truth is that if the AISPC had done nothing beyond bringing out these publications, its contribution towards solving the problems of the states would have been reckoned high, for this literature filled a great void and prepared the ground for the future struggle.

The second session of the AISPC was also held in Bombay in 1929. It was presided over by the famous Indian journalist and leading liberal leader, C.Y. Chintamani, while Prof. G.R. Abhyankar was the Chairman of the Reception Committee. Prominent among those who attended this session were Mahatma Gandhi, N.C. Kelkar, Ramachandra Rao, Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel, Satyamurti, Jamnalal Bajaj, K.F. Nariman, L.R. Tairsee, Vaman Rao Naik, Sardul Singh Caveeshar, Srinivasa Iyengar, Atiya Begum, Jamnadas Mehta and K. Natarajan. The Conference had attracted world-wide notice, which was evident from the fact that not only eminent Indians unattached to any political group but also a number of labour and liberal MPs from England had sent their messages of sympathy and wished the Conference a success. Among such foreign well-wishers were Lord Olivier, Col. Wedgewood Benn and Rutherford Polak.

The tone of the discussions and the general trend of the proceedings was set by C.Y. Chintamani's presidential address. Chintamani made it clear that in any federal scheme, the states' people will have to be given the same rights and sense of participation as the people living in British India. He criticised the Paramount power and the princes for their obstructive attitude in the matter of constitutional reform in the states on the one hand and working overtime for introducing reforms in the all-India sphere on the other. Chintamani laid the utmost emphasis on

establishing the rule of law in the states and fostering among their people the sense of security and genuine loyalty, which, in the present circumstances, could hardly be expected there.

An important point, which was made at the Conference in the course of discussions, was that the problem of Indian states had two aspects, internal and external. The external aspect related to the organic link of the states with British India and it was closely akin to the two terms of reference decided by the Butler Committee, which had submitted its report a few months before the Conference session was held. The internal aspect of the problem related to the form of government existing in each state, its examination with a view to suggesting improvements leading eventually to the establishment of responsible government. The contention of the AISPC was that the two bodies appointed to deal with the problem of India, namely, the Simon Commission and the Butler Committee did not touch the internal aspect of the problem at all. This criticism was indeed unanswerable. It was ironical that so much was being done to safeguard the security and privileges of the princes by the Government of India and the British Government, but no one seemed to give any thought to the 80 million people living in the states. In all the discussions and confabulations, which took place for several long years, especially while the new Constitution of India was being formulated, the voice of the states' people went unheard and they as a body remained unrepresented. The resolution adopted by the Conference condemned in strong terms the method and manner in which the Indian States Enquiry Committee conducted its proceedings without the Committee affording to the people of the states any opportunity to place their views before it.

The third session of the AISPC was again held in Bombay. It was presided over by Ramanand Chatterjee, Editor of the *Modern Review* and the Chairman of the Reception Committee was Lakshmi Dass Raoji Tairsee. Those who attended represented a cross-section of public opinion in India, prominent among them being Subhas Chandra Bose, Smt. Kamla Nehru, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Shri and Smt. K.M. Munshi, Sir Lalu Bhai Sanwaldas, Nagin Das T. Master, Jamna Das Mehta, Balwantray Mehta, Yusuf Meherally, G.R. Abhyankar, and many other leading lights of the Indian States, and British India.

Ramanand Chatterjee, in his presidential address put forward in a forceful plea for responsible government in the states and appealed to the Indian princes to learn a lesson from the king of England who did not arrogate to himself the position of a representative of his people. Following the concrete example, the rulers of Indian states should also behave as constitutional monarchs and redress the grievances of their subjects. He also made a pointed reference to the glaring contrast

between the states and British India so far as civil liberties and the rule of law were concerned. Unless this gap was narrowed, the princes would continue to face resistance and popular agitation for reform in their respective territories. Ramanand Chatterjee made an impassioned appeal to the rulers to see the signs of the times and look upon themselves as constitutional heads of their states in sheer self-interest, if for no other reason.

The Chairman of the Reception Committee put in a strong plea for unity among subjects of all the states, so that they could agitate more effectively for the establishment of self-government within their respective territories. He said that unless the people of the states were guaranteed freedom of speech, thought and association and assured of personal safety with the right to appeal to the federal court, their aspirations were not likely to be satisfied. Tairsee appealed to the Conference to hold its next session in some Indian state instead of meeting year after year in Bombay.

Prominent Congress leaders including Madan Mohan Malaviya, Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Smt. Kamla Nehru and others, addressed the Conference. They assured the states' people of their sympathy in their struggle and hoped that the princes would try to appreciate the people's aspirations and concede their legitimate demands.

The real insight into the mind of the Conference can be had only from the resolution which it adopted. The Conference repudiated the claims of the princes to represent their people at the Round Table Conference or act as their spokesmen. It demanded that representatives of the states' people should be included among the delegates asked to attend the Round Table Conference. It appealed to all members of the Round Table Conference in general and Mahatma Gandhi in particular, to take care of the interests of the people of the states as distinguished from those of the princes and requested the leaders to lay emphasis on the following essential points:

1. The Federal Government should embrace within its ambit all subjects of all-India concern that required uniformity of regulation. (The Conference while generally asking for extension of the range of federal power, wished to specify, among others, Civil and Criminal Law, Labour Legislation, Adult Franchise, as subjects, which it was necessary to place on the Federal List in order to make Federal Government sufficiently strong.)

2. Administration of all federal subjects should generally be under the control of the Federal Executive.

3. No state joining the Federation should be allowed, as was proposed in certain quarters, to withdraw any subject from the scope of the Federal Government, so that subjects placed on the Federal list should be federal for all the states without any exception,



4. That all powers of Paramountcy exercised by the Government of India over the states should, under the new Constitution, be vested in the Federal Government and not in the Viceroy and an irresponsible Political Department.

The fourth session of the AISPC, which was also held in Bombay in 1934, was presided over by N.C. Kelkar and attended by prominent public men from the states and British India including, among others, Prof. Abhyankar, A.V. Thakkar, Dr. Mohd. Alam, A.V. Patwardhan and Abdul Rehman Cassam Mitha. Jamna Das Mehta was the Chairman of the Reception Committee.

In his presidential address, Kelkar deplored the apathy of Muslim state subjects towards the struggle for freedom. He said it would be unfortunate if a situation similar to that which characterised the Indian National Congress was created in regard to AISPC also. The princes and the state governments were only too eager to play one section of the community against the other. It was, he said, for the Muslim community to see as to where its real interest lay.

Jamna Das Mehta denounced in his address the practice of the Political Department and the ruling princes appointing Europeans as Ministers in States. It was a dangerous practice, particularly because in the proposed federal legislature some of these Ministers might be nominated as representatives of the Indian States.

It is very significant that this session of the Conference adopted a resolution which may be said to be complimentary to the rulers. The resolution demanded that as the people were the final judges of the virtues or vices of the ruling princes and their governments, no prince should be suspended or removed from his *Gaddi* for alleged misrule unless there was a clearly expressed demand from the All-India States' People's Conference to that effect. The Conference opined that in such cases, where the ruler was removed, a committee fully representative of the state subjects should be appointed for carrying on the state administration during the period of the enquiry instead of entrusting the administration to a civilian nominated by the Paramount Power.

The Conference noted with distress the tendency on the part of certain princes to float commercial and industrial concerns in their own name or to grant monopolies therefore to certain individuals for their own benefit. The maritime states of Kathiawad were the worst culprits of such monopolistic practices. The Conference urged immediate abolition and stoppage of such undesirable trading policies and granting of monopolies and licences.

In order that the national solidarity of India may be maintained unimpaired, the Conference urged that no Indian state should be given the option of joining or not joining the All-India federation. It pleaded that it should be made obligatory for all states to federate either singly or

in groups. The Conference also expressed itself against the granting of weightage to Indian states in the future federal legislature and demanded that as a matter of principle representation should be given to the state subjects in proportion to their population.

The Conference pointed out that certain princes were establishing ineffective legislative bodies which were neither representative in character nor free to enact laws. Such legislatures were intended only to camouflage the real designs of the rulers. It called upon the Government of India to see that all the Indian states implemented the four reforms suggested by Lord Irwin during his Viceroyalty, namely, the establishment of effective representative legislatures, setting up of independent High Courts, giving permanency to state services and fixing of privy purses.

Considering the question of the All-India Federation, the Conference supported the federal idea in principle but it demanded that federal citizenship on the basis of equality of privilege should be recognised in respect of all citizens of India whether living in the states or the provinces. It also reiterated the view expressed in earlier sessions that there could be no real union between the democratically governed British provinces and autocratically ruled states, and, therefore, stressed that the process of democratisation of the latter should be expedited in order to bring them on par with the provinces.

For all these reasons, the Conference felt that unless it was suitably modified the federal scheme as embodied in the White Paper was inimical to the interests of British India as much as to those of the states' people.

Thanks to the efforts of the AISPC, the problem of the people of the states had by now become a burning political question. In the contest of the proposed reforms to be adopted in the case of British Indian provinces and the stress that discussions placed on the federal idea that was to involve the states, some panic had set in. Some panicky. The entire non-official Press, especially the Congress, supported the cause of the states' people. They supported their demand for parity with the provinces in respect of election to the proposed federal assembly. The princes were particularly worried about the attacks they were subjected to by the Indian Press. With a view to placating the princes, the government decided to enact a new law. A bill called the Indian States Protection Bill was already introduced in the Central Legislative Assembly. The idea was to muzzle the Press and save the princes from adverse criticism and exposure. In so far as this spate of criticism was linked with the activities of the AISPC, this young organisation had every reason to feel that the new measure was aimed against it.

The states' people decided to register an emphatic protest against the

**Bill.** A special session of the AISPC was convened at Delhi for the purpose under the presidentship of K. Natarajan. In his presidential address, Natarajan said that the princes, who were keen to associate their people with the task of administration, had nothing to fear whereas those who were determined to continue to stay as autocrats and despots should know that they had their day. Such princes, he said, were an anachronism. Others who criticised the Bill included P.L. Chudgar and Mani Shankar Trivedi of Western India States, B.S. Pathak of Rajputana States, Anant Rao of Central India States and Mohd. Talib Hussain of Punjab States.

The next session of the AISPC was held in Karachi in 1936 proved to be of great importance. It was presided over by Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya and was attended, among others, by the Congress President, Jawaharlal Nehru, and an ex-Congress President, Rajendra Prasad. Although the freedom movements in states and in British India were in a way inter-linked and closely related to each other, yet on surface the relationship between the two movements always left something to be clarified. After Gandhij's clear-cut writings and elucidations, the speeches made at the Karachi session by Dr. Sitaramayya, Jawaharlal Nehru and Rajendra Prasad furnished the best clue to the Congress attitude to the struggle by the states' people for civil liberties and self-government. Dr. Pattabhi's interest in the movement had been of long standing and his connection with the AISPC proved to be a boon to the Conference in the long run.

While inaugurating the Conference, Jawaharlal Nehru threw ample light on the Congress policy towards the Indian States. He expressed his desire to remove certain misunderstandings that existed between the States' people and the Congress. Emphasising the unity and indivisibility of India, he said that the fight of the Congress for Indian independence also included the liberation of states' subjects, but, he added in parenthesis, only on India emerging independent. If the Congress attained Swaraj, the states' people would inevitably share their liberation. One thing, he said, to be understood clearly was that it was the British Government and not the Indian princes, who had to be fought for attaining freedom and responsible government in the states. As the Congress was busy fighting the British Government, once its fight bore fruit and the British power tumbled, the princes would not be able to resist the demand of the states' people.

In his address Rajendra Prasad commended the work of the AISPC. He generally endorsed the remarks of Nehru and assured the states' peoples of Congress sympathy with their cause.

Something must be said here about the inability or unwillingness of the Congress to allow branches of the Congress to be set up in the states and the dissatisfaction of the states' peoples with the Congress stand.

The relationship appeared tenuous in view of the sympathy of the Congress with the states' peoples in their hardships and the overt association and even support of many leading Congressmen for the aims and objects of the movement started in several states for democratisation of the administrative set-ups. By far the best clarification of the position is provided by Gandhiji, who was admittedly the closest friend of the people of the states and yet who, on principle, wanted the states' people to organise their struggle for reform on their own without involving the Congress in it directly.

According to Gandhiji, it was not lack of appreciation or sympathy that compelled, on the part of the Congress, to resort to the policy of non-interference, but it was sheer helplessness which dictated this policy. It was his conviction that any attempt on the part of the Congress at interference would only damage the cause of the states' peoples. He lost no opportunity to advise the princes to grant autonomy to their subjects and regard themselves as trustees of the people over whom they ruled, drawing for themselves only a small fixed percentage of the income. Gandhiji had never lost hope that the princes would respond to his advice and for that reason, he never sought to destroy their status. As he repeatedly said, he was keen on converting them to his view by persuasion.

It must also be said that Gandhiji's attitude towards the problem of the states throughout remained consistent. He summarised it amply well in his reply to N.C. Kelkar's letter. As President of the All-India States' Peoples' Conference (1934), Kelkar had asked Gandhiji to clarify his statement at the Round Table Conference about the election of states' representatives in the Proposed federation. At the Round Table Conference, Gandhiji had expressed views favouring the election of the states' representatives, but he had not laid it down as an essential condition of the Congress joining the federation. Kelkar had now asked Gandhiji in his letter : "Make it clear beyond the possibility of doubt, for we know that the rulers of the states are putting a different interpretation of what you said." In his letter he further added: "Since in the final determination of the Congress policy on these points your personal view plays such a decisive part, we are anxious to know whether election of the states' people and a Declaration of Rights in their interest are, in your opinion, merely desirable features of a federation or essential conditions thereof...."

Gandhiji's reply to Kelkar's letter was not calculated to remove the misgivings of the states' people. Instead of dealing directly with the points raised by Kelkar, he wrote that what he had said at the Round Table Conference was "in the nature of an appeal to the Princes". It did not imply, he added, that whether they listened to the appeal or not, the Congress would enter the federation. Gandhiji reiterated that the

policy of non-interference that the Congress had followed was "wise and sound". This was followed by a statement of his own views about the states. He said:

"The states are independent entities under the British law. That part of India which is described as British has no more power to shape the policy of the states than it has (say) that of Afghanistan or Ceylon.

"I wish it were otherwise but I recognise my importance in the matter. India of the states is undoubtedly an integral part of geographical India. But that carried us no further than where we stand today. Portuguese and French India are also an integral part of geographical India, but we are powerless to shape the course of events there.

"We enrol members from the states in the Congress. We receive considerable assistance from them. It is not want of appreciation or will that compels our non-interference. It is our helplessness.

"It is my conviction that any attempt on the part of the Congress at interference can only damage the cause of the people in the states.

"But there is nothing to prevent us from urging the states to adopt a certain policy.

"I am of the opinion that whatever we are able to accomplish in British India is bound to affect the states."

Naturally enough the most important part of Dr. Sitaramayya's presidential address was the remarks he made about the relationship between the States' people and the Indian National Congress. The views he expressed were, in some respects, in sharp contrast with what Nehru and Rajendra Prasad had said on the subject. He said that the Congress was not justified in leaving the states' peoples to their fate. He went to the length of confessing that the attitude of the Congress towards the states' problems had not been as might be expected and that it needed a substantial change. He thought that the states' peoples were fully justified in asking the plain question : "Are you working for a federation or are you working for the Swaraj for British Indian provinces only ? If the former, do not assume an attitude of apathy or condescension towards the states' peoples and their problems ; if the latter, say so, and wish you success and hope to receive strength ourselves therefrom. We welcome it, but part company now and here." Replying to the question he had himself posed. Dr. Sitaramayya held that it could be taken for granted that the former view was correct, that is to say, the Congress stood for a federation of the entire country.

One of the resolutions adopted by the Conference referred to the Government of India Act (1935). The Conference condemned the proposed federal structure in which the states' people had been denied representation and in the formation of which they had not been consulted at any stage.

What can be described as a landmark in the history of the states' peoples' movement was the formation of the Civil Liberties Union at the

Karachi session. Jai Narayan Vyas of Jodhpur moved the relevant resolution with the following words : "Those persons who live in the states or have connections with the state subjects would only know what sort of atrocities and repressions are perpetrated on the people there and how civil liberties are denied to them. We cannot ventilate our grievances in the states to the extent to which we can do it in British India. The stories of repression and wrongs committed there day after day would sound incredible like fairy tales, but they are actual facts."

The workers of the All India States' Peoples' Conference held a convention at Navasari in February 1938 for taking stock of the ever-changing situation and for considering a few pressing problems with which political workers in the Indian States were confronted. Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya presided. The foremost of these problems was, of course, the all-India federation looming on the political horizon of the country. Though the states' people had hardly left anything unsaid on the question, the uncertainties of the situation were such that they felt they could not reiterate their views too often.

The immediate cause of calling the Convention, however, was to give a fresh look to their problems arising from a resolution adopted by the Congress Working Committee at its Calcutta meeting. This Resolution, while expressing full sympathy with the people of the states in their struggle for responsible government and liberalisation of the administrations in princely states, had said in no uncertain terms that the Indian states should form their own political organisations that need not be called Congress Committees. The states' peoples thought it was unjust for the Congress Working Committee to ban the formation of the Congress Committees in the states, while as India's principal political organisation, the Congress was fighting for the freedom of the whole country. The assumption on the part of the Working committee that the states' people lacked mass support or action served only to add insult to injury. The states' peoples thought that national awakening and political upsurge were as much in evidence in the states as in the provinces.

After various speakers had vented their feelings and taken the Congress Working Committee to task for not giving the states' peoples their due, saner counsels prevailed, thanks to the sympathetic and tactful speech of the Chairman of the Convention. The original Resolution was suitably amended, shorn of unsavoury words and couched in moderate language only to voice the disappointment of the states' peoples at their not being allowed to set up Congress Committees in the princely states. The Resolution expressed the hope that the official attitude of the Congress Working Committee would be altered in favour of the Indian states' people at the next session of the Congress. A draft resolution was prepared with the idea of requesting the Congress to adopt it with a view to meeting the viewpoint of the states' people. It was Dr. Pattabhi's

handiwork. It ran as follows:

"The Congress stands for the same political, social and economic freedom in the States as the rest of India and considers the States as an integral part of India, which cannot be separated. *Purna Swaraj* or complete independence, which is the objective of the Congress, is for the whole of India inclusive of the States, for the integrity and unity of India must be maintained in freedom as it has been maintained in subjection. The only kind of federation that can be acceptable to the Congress is one in which the States participate as free units enjoying the measure of democratic freedom as the rest of India."

This draft was accepted by the Congress and was moved as an official resolution at the Haripura session.

This may be said to have clarified the position of the Indian States' people *vis-a-vis* the Indian National Congress and put the relations between the Congress and the AISPC on an even keel.

The next session of the All India States' Peoples' Conference was held at Ludhiana in 1939. It was presided over by Jawaharlal Nehru. Considering the timings of the Conference, the political climate in the country and the decisions taken at Ludhiana, this session may be considered to be the most crucial in the history of the States' People's movement. There was evidence that every important factor having a bearing on the freedom struggle in the Indian States had started undergoing a change for the better, to the advantage of the agitators. Thanks to the persistent efforts of the states' people and their leaders, there was a ferment among the subjects of these princely territories. There were signs of awakening all over and the people were becoming conscious of their rights and, what is more, impatient of their burdens and disabilities.

The most important development since the last session of the AISPC was that now the Congress held office in eight provinces, constituting more than half the country. Always in sympathy with the demands of the states' people, the Congress sympathy had now changed into administrative expediency. They could not allow Indian states affairs to be the exclusive preserve of the political Department functioning from New Delhi. The provincial governments asserted their rights to shape the Central policy in a matter which affected one-fourth of the country's population. Linked closely geographically and economically as the states and the provinces were, the Congress ministries were bound to take notice of gross misrule in the states and to tender advice to Paramount Power as to what in their opinion should be done to stop this misrule. This is how Gandhiji put it when questioned by someone as to why the Congress should now interfere in the internal affairs of the states.

An added force had been lent to these events by agitation in a large number of states and against the oppressive use of force by the Central and States' Governments. In the states in Orissa, for example,

brutal force had to be used to suppress popular agitation, resulting in several casualties. In Jaipur, Babha, Patiala, Kapurthala, etc., popular agitation was sought to be suppressed by force, and leaders of the agitation were meted out ghastly treatment. In bigger states, particularly Hyderabad, Kashmir and Travancore, state governments had tried to give a communal turn to political agitation and thus justify the use of armed forces against the agitators. In Hyderabad, it was alleged to be a Hindu agitation against a Muslim ruler; in Kashmir, it was said to be a Muslim majority in revolt against a Hindu ruler and in Travancore Sir C.P. Ramaswami Aiyer attempted to dub the agitation as a diabolical move on the part of Christians to overthrow a Hindu ruler. On top of all this came the views expressed by the workers of the AISPC at the Navasari Convention. This made a decisive impact on the Congress leadership.

The proof, if one was needed, was provided by the fact that this crucial session was chaired not only by an ex-Congress President but a dynamic leader, Jawaharlal Nehru. He summed up the whole situation in his characteristic way. After giving an analysis of the situation obtaining in the Indian states and stating reasons as to why the people in British India could not afford to be indifferent to the agitation in the states, Jawaharlal referred to the signs of conflict, friction and violence all over the world, leading inevitably to chaos. He added :

"None of us wants this chaos in India, for that is no prelude to freedom. Yet, while we recognise that our strength grows, the forces of disruption and disintegration, of communalism and provincialism, of irresponsibility and narrow-mindedness also grow. . . . Yet in India, there are gleams of hope, though dark clouds assail us. And the brightest of these rays come from the newly awakened people of the states. We, who presume to shoulder the burden of their struggle, have a heavy responsibility and it will require all our courage and our wisdom to discharge that faithfully. Strong language will not help us; it is often a sign of weakness and a substitute for action. It is action that is commanded today, wise and effective action, which takes us speedily to our goal, controls and the forces of disruption, and builds up the united India of our dream".

Referring to the states' people's struggle in the context of the larger nationalist movement in India, Nehru said: "The freedom of the people of the states is a big enough thing, yet it is a part of the larger freedom of India, and till we gain that larger freedom, it is a struggle for us. If the federation is imposed upon us, we shall fight it and sweep it away. Whenever the British power intervenes against the people in the states, we shall have to face it. The time is approaching when the final solution has to come—the Constituent Assembly of all the Indian people framing the Constitution of a free and democratic India."

Several resolutions were adopted by the Ludhiana session of the



**AISPC.** The most important of them defined the concept of visibility in relation to the Indian States. It said that states with a population of 20 lakhs and a revenue of Rs. 50 lakh alone could be considered as viable administrative units. Excepting such states, all other states must be grouped together or merged in neighbouring states or provinces. It was a positive approach to the problem of the states, and there is evidence to believe that even the Political Department and the Viceroy took the Conference seriously. In a way, the resolution was no more than an improvement upon the thoughts of the Viceroy himself, the only difference being that the AISPC had come out with a clear-cut definition of viability dividing states into two categories, namely, states which had a right to continue to exist and states which must cease to exist as independent units of administration.

With the war breaking out a few months later and the Congress ministries resigning from the provinces, the whole situation changed in the country, including that of the states. To take stock of the situation, a meeting of the standing committee of the AISPC was convened by Jawaharlal Nehru at Poona in July 1940. In his address, Nehru stressed the need for keeping in touch with the people in pursuit of their resolve to prepare the masses for the struggle that lay ahead. Among others, who addressed the convention, were Pattabhi Sitaramayya, Jamna Lal Bajaj, Balwantray Mehta, Mian Iftikhar-ud-Din, Kashinath Rao Vaidya, Jai Narayan Vyas, Gopi Krishna Vijaya-vargiya and Talib Hussain.

The convention adopted several resolutions reiterating the states' people's demand for self-government and sending in people's representatives if and when the states joined the proposed federation.

We now come to the last two sessions of the AISPC, one held at Udaipur in 1945 and the other at Gwalior in 1947. These were the only sessions held in princely states, and that in itself was indicative of the great constitutional change in the offing. Both the sessions were presided over by Jawaharlal Nehru, who, after Gandhiji, had by now become the foremost guide and friend of the states' people. Though Pattabhi Sitaramayya and Sardar Patel had done much to own up the cause of the states' peoples and bring the AISPC and the Congress close to each other, it was given to Jawaharlal Nehru to galvanise the whole movement. By his indefatigable efforts and dynamic leadership of the AISPC he literally transformed the movement and did much to turn their dream into reality. Firm and fearless as ever, after he had taken over as Vice-President of the Interim Government, Nehru did not bother as to what the Political Department thought of his plans so far as the states were concerned. Nothing could stop him from visiting Kashmir in 1945 though he knew he would not be welcome there. It was only after the Viceroy's intervention that the ban on Nehru's entry

into the valley was lifted by the state government. Whatever promise he had made in early years to the AISPC, he fulfilled them, namely, to get civil liberties and ensure security of person and property, to let states' peoples' representatives join the Constituent Assembly and, lastly, to make the people of the states equal partners in the conduct of national affairs. Verily he was able to turn postulates into axioms.

Since Nehru's direct and active interest in the affairs of the states, the meetings of the standing committee of the AISPC had begun to be started along with the sessions of the Congress. Discussion of the states' peoples' problems, particularly their future relationship with the rest of India, invariably formed part of the agenda taken up at the Congress sessions. The truth is that after the Ludhiana session of the AISPC (1939), the line dividing the Indian National Congress and the AISPC began getting dimmer and dimmer.

When Jawaharlal Nehru presided over the Udaipur session of the AISPC, he had already joined the Interim Government at the Centre as Vice-President of the Viceroy's Executive Council. The government of the state, though it cannot be said to have participated in the Conference did not obstruct its proceedings and the Maharaja of Udaipur expressed a desire to meet the President of the Conference and have talks with him, which he did a few days later.

From the speeches made and the resolutions adopted at the Conference, one could have a clear indication of the fact that the change in the political atmosphere prevailing all over the country had also permeated the bounds of the Indian states. Though the fight for responsible government in states was still to continue, many an old problem had either been solved or the way cleared for a suitable solution. The controversy, for example, about civil liberties and representation of the people in the administration were, in theory at least, no longer in dispute now. Apart from certain petty rulers, who were either incapable of appreciating political happenings or were otherwise blind to the coming tide, the princely world had begun to recognise the need to concede some of the major demands of their people.

The Udaipur session took note of these trends. It felicitated the princes like the rulers of Aundh, Cochin, Gwalior and Bhavnagar on the bold step they had taken in conceding reforms voluntarily and reiterated its demand for the acceptance of responsible government by other rulers. However, in the light of what was happening in a large number of states, these exceptional cases, alas, paled into insignificance. In many states, repression was still in vogue. In some states, the clever princes had set up rival political organisations to fight the Praja Mandals and the All-India States' People's Conference. Agrarian trouble was still in evidence in many of them. The AISPC took note of all these happenings and condemned the rulers in no uncertain terms. In some of them, Praja

Mandal workers were being treated harshly in jails. It also expressed concern at the appalling conditions and social and economic backwardness in a majority of the states. The *jagiri* system, which in many cases, was even more oppressive than the state administration, came in for special criticism.

Another proof that things had been on the move on the political stage came from one of the resolutions adopted by the Conference. The Ludhiana session of the AISPC had defined viability of states and administrative units in terms of population and revenue. It had laid down that only such states could remain as separate administrative units, which had a population of at least 20 lakhs and a revenue of Rs. 50 lakh. It had suggested that the rest of the states should be either grouped or merged with neighbouring provinces. The Udaipur session changed all this, which threw more light on the rising hopes and aspirations of the people. While it accepted the old norms of population, and revenue, it made it clear that the states, which did not fulfil these standards, must be wound up as administrative units. There was a ring of definiteness in their resolutions this time and it was taken for granted that smaller states had had their day.

In April 1947, the last session of the All-India States' people's Conference was held at Gwalior. The 18 months that separated it from the Udaipur session had witnessed changes of such far-reaching importance that the views held earlier and the decisions taken at Udaipur now looked out of date. For example, the Gwalior session further raised the criteria of viability. It said that only those states could continue as separate administrative units which had a population of 50 lakhs or more and an annual revenue of at least Rs. 3 crore. This was symbolic of the people's rising hopes and symptomatic of the new order of things. India was on the threshold of freedom and the Paramountcy was going to end. The future of the states had been put in the crucible. The main point was what kind of mould should they now have for determining the future shape of the princely territories.

In contrast to the atmosphere of optimism, all round progress and clear signs that at long last the skein of the states' problem was going to be disentangled, reports came of harrowing tales of repression from many states. If most of the princes were outwardly reserved and found themselves unable to react to popular demands sympathetically, some of them were openly hostile to those demands out of sheer despair and helplessness. A few of them like Travancore, Hyderabad, Kashmir and Bhopal interpreted the British Government's declaration about the termination of Paramountcy as freedom to the princes to set up independent kingdoms. Travancore at least made no secret of it. Nor did Hyderabad and some other rulers, who started thinking in terms of consolidating their territories as if India was going to be balkanised.

There were disturbing trends. Luckily for the AISPC, the responsibility to meet this challenge was no longer theirs. It had now shifted on to the future Government of India. The Conference, however, thought it its duty to protest against and condemn oppressive laws and cruel treatment of their workers in a number of states.

A very important decision taken by the AISPC at the Gwalior session was the unequivocal rejection of the proposed grouping sponsored by the Jam Sahib of Nawanagar and some rulers of the Deccan States. Gandhiji, Sardar Patel and Jawaharlal Nehru and leaders of the Conference saw through the game. Mahatma Gandhi had clearly told the princes that what they were keen to accomplish did not belong to them. That is to say, it was for the people of the states to decide their future and not for the princes. The best that the princes could do was to concede responsible government and set up representative institutions in their respective territories. It would then be for such governments and their representatives to meet and decide the future set-up of Saurashtra or—the Deccan states or any other group of states. Gandhiji's clear-cut views and the AISPC's resolution finished with one stroke the attempt of the princes to take up in their hands the political leadership of their people.

The All-India States' Peoples' Conference, it may be noted, held in all eight sessions and a few special conventions during its life span of about 20 years. It was now coming to the end of its labours. There was a time when the states' people were at pains to explain that as a political entity India was one and indivisible. They once thought that this theory was not being fully accepted by the Congress, which insisted on giving priority to the problems of the British provinces, leaving the states to be contented with its sympathy and moral support and fend for themselves.

That stage had long passed. Coming events had already made this controversy outmoded. In the eyes of those who were moulding the destiny of the country, there was now no difference between the princely states and the provinces, just as no distinction could be made between the All-India States' People's Conference and the Indian National Congress.

Another feature of these happenings on the eve of independence was that they were a pointer to the re-distribution of provinces on the basis of language and cultural affinity. The merger of the states brought this question to the fore. In his declaration conceding responsible government, the Maharaja of Cochin had made a reference to united Kerala in clear terms. Similarly, the Gwalior session had protested against certain changes made by the Political Department in its administrative set-up. It had transferred the States of Janjira, Jaora, Surgana and Dang from the Deccan States Agency, and this the AISPC did not like, for it thought that such a change was against the cultural and linguistic affinities of the people of these states. It meant in other words that the

linguistic and cultural question was going to be one of the criteria determining the future grouping or merger of states.

As it actually turned out later, the process of the redistribution of boundaries of the provinces (called States after Independence) made no distinction between the traditional boundaries of the old provinces and the states. The States Reorganisation Commission went about its job, in keeping with its terms of reference, without taking into consideration the earlier territorial divisions. Thus alone it was made possible to give effect to the demands of united Kerala, Aikya Karnataka and, to an extent, of Samyukta Maharashtra. The work done by the workers of the AISPC during earlier years and their cooperation at this stage proved of great help to the Commission.

About the facts of integration much has been said. Let it be added that with the merger of the states with neighbouring provinces or the formation of separate unions, a constitutional problem had cropped up, which could be solved only with the help of the AISPC. As such as a state joined the process of democratisation, its people had to be represented in India's Constituent Assembly and the local ad hoc assembly. As many of these territories had no representative institutions, their representatives had to be chosen from among the workers of the Praja Mandals and the AISPC. In the case of Rajasthan, Saurashtra, Himachal Pradesh, Vindhya Pradesh and Manipur even the first lot of popular ministers had to be picked up from among the local workers of the States' Peoples' Conference. There could have been nothing more appropriate, and for the AISPC nothing more lucky, than to find the workers trained by it in the school of practical experience coming forward to shoulder the responsibility of manning the legislatures and the administration.

It is only proper to ascribe the smooth merger of the Indian states leading to the consolidation of the princely territories with the democratically governed provinces to Sardar Patel's shrewdness and the wise leadership. No one can deny Patel's unique contribution in accomplishing this task, but it should not be forgotten that one of the sources of his strength was the AISPC and the confidence his leadership inspired among its workers and leaders all over the country. Those who have first-hand knowledge of the working of the All-India States' Peoples' Conference before Independence and the role of its leaders and workers immediately after freedom when Sardar Patel started tackling the gigantic task of national consolidation, can have no hesitation in acknowledging the valuable contribution the Conference made to the successful completion of this task.

The most striking feature of this achievement is that it was accomplished in a precisely democratic way without firing a bullet and without shedding a drop of blood. Credit for it would, no doubt, be given to

some of the princes as well as those who saw the signs of the times and responding to Sardar Patel's patriotic move, agreed to align themselves with the forces of democracy. It is true that their sense of patriotism made this operation painless, but no one can deny that the very atmosphere which changed princely attitudes so abruptly was created by the peoples' incessant efforts. Can it be forgotten that only in January 1947 the Chamber of Princes had protested through its Chancellor against the objectives of the Constituent Assembly because the princes did not accept the view that "the Republic would derive its powers and authority from the people".

Even when the merger of certain states was agreed to in principle, the actual settlement of the issue and the selection of one alternative out of many was facilitated by the stand which the peoples' representatives in the said states took up. There were occasions when on account of their commitments to the rulers, the States Ministry could not have forced the princes to opt for the only correct alternative, namely, voluntary surrender of their ruling powers and privileges. Here also, the Praja Mandals and the popular movements came in like what philosophers call *deus ex machine* to bring about the desired result. The whole process of states' merger and the consolidation of their territories with the former provinces was done by the Ministry of States in close collaboration with and active support of the workers of the States' Peoples' Conference.













